

**OPINION 6**  
BJP RETAINS CONTROL,  
INDIA GAINS GROUND

**WORLD 8**  
BIDEN ADMIN SENDING \$1 BILLION  
MORE IN WEAPONS, AMMO TO ISRAEL

**MONEY 10**  
MARKETS SNAP THREE  
DAYS WINNING RUN

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## Mamata promises to back INDIA in power

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■  
KOLKATA

Often proudly claiming to be the true architect of the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had previously decided to contest elections in Bengal without the Congress and the Left. However, on Wednesday, she announced that she would support INDIA Bloc from the outside if it came to power.

Addressing an election rally at Chinsurah in Hooghly district, Mamata said, "After the Modi Government goes we will provide the leadership to the INDIA Bloc and support it from outside and ensure that the people of Bengal — including those who have not been paid the wages for hundred days' work — get back their rights."

Mamata's claim came a day after she told another rally that the first four phases of polling have clearly indicated that the weather for the BJP is changing and that INDIA Bloc would win 315 seats against 195 that would fall in the saffron party's bag. "Modi is going and there will be no Modi in Delhi... and Didi will ensure that the INDIA Bloc comes to power at the Centre," she said.

Notwithstanding her "outside support" pledge for INDIA Bloc, Mamata said by INDIA she did not mean the Left and the Congress of Bengal. "I don't mean the



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee greets supporters during an election roadshow for the Lok Sabha polls, in Howrah, on Wednesday

Left and the Congress of Bengal, who are the agents of the BJP and are fighting the elections separately. I am talking about the Congress that is in Delhi,"



she said, leading to a lot of criticism from both the Left and the State Congress ranks. "Didi is also afraid because she is thinking

that if the INDIA Bloc comes to power, then she might have to turn to them to save her leaders, her nephew, and herself. So, she is trying to separate the national leadership and the State

leadership of the INDIA parties. However, they are not fools. She has managed to save herself by striking a deal with Modi, but after there is no BJP in Delhi, she will have to answer for her misdeeds," said CPI(M)'s Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya. Back to the rallies both Mamata and Union Home Minister Amit Shah traded relentless fire.

Shah referred to the Sandeshkhali incident saying the Chief Minister had developed her own modus operandi where "she lets her men first commit crimes... and to hide it she gets more crimes committed... Sandeshkhali is a classic example of this."

On the other hand, Mamata attacked the Prime Minister calling him a publicity man. "Here is a Prachar Babu who wants to get photographed everywhere... asking him to appear in new dresses and get photographed and he has no problem because he wants publicity only... publicity and lies are his two weapons," Mamata said questioning the Prime Minister's earlier claims that he was giving cooking gas, ration and other facilities to the people for free.

"He promised ₹15 lakh in every account... did you get it... he promised 2 crore jobs per year... did you get that job... he is telling you that he is giving gas and ration for free... but that is also not true... he is only a prachar babu who thrives on publicity," she said.

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## USCIS plans extra time for laid off Indian H-1B workers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

In a possible relief to scores of Indians, laid-off H-1B workers can stay beyond 60 days in the US. This directive by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) comes amid a slew of layoffs by tech companies in the US, which have impacted thousands of employees, including Indians.

The USCIS clarified that laid-off H-1B visa holders could stay in the US beyond the 60-day period. To remain in the US beyond the grace period, the laid-off H-1B workers can apply for a new employer, change visa status, or adjust their visa status. H-1B non-immigrants can work for a new employer after filing a new H-1B petition. Tech companies like Google, Meta, Apple, Dell, Twitter, Amazon, and Microsoft, among many others, have terminated scores of non-immigrant employees living in the US, including many Indians.

There is a general assumption that laid-off staffers have to leave the US within 60 days. However, the USCIS has clarified this in its latest statement. "When non-immigrant workers are laid off, they may not be aware of their options and, in some cases, may wrongly assume that they have no option but to leave the country within 60 days," stated the USCIS in its latest release.



Photo: The Pioneer

## Ram temple, Modi aura will see me through: Bidhuri

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, a veteran in the politics of the national Capital, is vying for the South Delhi Lok Sabha 2024 seat as a BJP candidate. He claimed that the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya will have a significant impact on the voters of his constituency, who will vote for him to give Prime Minister Narendra Modi a third term in a row.

The sitting MLA from Badarpur and Leader of the Opposition said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is not an alternative to Modi. Having an experience in the political domain for 53 long years, Bidhuri told The Pioneer in the midst of his campaign that people have made up their minds.

"They are going to vote for Modi above caste, religion and community. In front of people, there is no alternative to Modi. Rahul tries to be his alternative but people are not taking him seriously. I believe that last time, the BJP candidates had 57 per cent to 60 per cent votes. This time, BJP is going to get more than 70 per cent votes. BJP is winning all seven seats in Delhi because people have a lot of faith in Modi," he said.

Born and brought up in a family of farmers in South Delhi's Tughlakabad village, he said he will get votes in the elections to make Modi secure a third term again, who he claims will get the same respect from the countrymen as Lord Ram and Krishna got.

## Uttarakhand Chief Secy feels SC heat

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Slamming the Uttarakhand Government for its "lackadaisical" approach in controlling forest fires, the Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the State's Chief Secretary to personally present himself before it on May 17 to give explanation, including on utilisation of funds and vacancies in forest department.

Terming it a "very sorry state of affairs", the apex court said the State was just trying to find some excuse or the other.

A bench headed by Justice B R Gavai directed that the staff and vehicles of the forest departments of States shall not be requisitioned for election purposes or any other purposes like the 'Char Dham Yatra'.

"We are at pains to say the approach of the State of Uttarakhand in controlling the fires is, to say the least, lackadaisical. Though action plans have been prepared and finalised, no steps are being taken for implementation of the same," said the bench, also comprising Justices SVN Bhatti and Sandeep



Mehta. The top court was hearing a plea on raging forest fires in Uttarakhand. The bench said when funds from the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) were available and also sanctioned by the Central authority, it saw no reason as to why only ₹3.41 crore out of the ₹9.12 crore was utilised for forest related activity in Uttarakhand in 2023-24.

The bench observed it also saw no reason as to why the balance amount was not utilised for forestry. "Another issue that needs to be addressed is with regard to huge vacancies in the forest department

of the State of Uttarakhand," it said. The bench noted that one of the grievances raised by the state was regarding failure of timely disbursement of the national disaster management fund or state disaster management fund.

"We fail to understand as to how the State could have grievance with regard to the disbursement of state disaster management funds in as much as it is within the domain of the state to disburse the said funds," it said.

"It is further pertinent to note that at one hand, the state contends that the resources, that is, manpower and vehicles are not available, and on the other hand, keeps a large number of

vacancies...," the bench observed. It said taking into consideration the importance of controlling forest fires in Uttarakhand, the apex court had requested Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Aishwarya Bhati to take instructions with regard to disbursement of funds for financial year 2023-2024.

The bench said in so far as CAMPA funds are concerned, it has been submitted that these funds are lying with the state and it was for the state to release them for works undertaken by the forest department.

It noted that as far as exemption of field officials of the forest department from election duty, Char Dham yatra and other related activities was concerned, the Election Commission by various orders has already exempted its staff and vehicles from elections and allied purposes.

"Be that as it may, we direct that in all the states, the forest staff as well as the forest vehicles shall not be requisitioned for election purposes or any other purposes like 'Char Dham Yatra'," the bench said.

## Rajmata Scindia passes away at AIIMS

PNS ■ GWALIOR/NEW DELHI

Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia's mother Rajmata Madhavi Raje Scindia died on Wednesday morning at AIIMS, Delhi, where she was on a ventilator for the last few days. She was undergoing treatment for the last three months and suffered from pneumonia, along with sepsis, sources said.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and senior Congress leaders Digvijaya Singh and Kamal Nath expressed grief over the death of Rajmata. People from the Gwalior-Chambal region mourned her demise and many took to social media to express grief.

Rajmata, who hailed from Nepal's Royal family, got married to former Union Minister Madhavrao Scindia in 1966. She is survived by her son Jyotiraditya Scindia and daughter Chitrangada Raje Singh.



In this April 23, 2002 photo, Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia's mother Madhavi Raje Scindia attends an event in New Delhi. She died on Wednesday morning at AIIMS in Delhi

Her mortal remains will be brought to Gwalior on Thursday morning and will be kept at the Rani Mahal in the Jai Vilas Palace for people to pay their respects. Her last rites will be performed at Amma Maharaj ki Chhatri in Gwalior on Thursday, sources said.

The last rites of late Rajmata Vijaya Raje Scindia and her son Madhav Rao Scindia had also been held at the same place.

## Nomadic bird haven turns a swamp

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Kabartal Lake, Asia's largest freshwater lake nestled in Bihar's Begusarai district and designated as a Ramsar Wetland site in 2020, is gasping for breath due to the State Government's inaction.

The unchecked expansion of human settlements, agricultural activities, and infrastructure development around this lake, once a paradise for large numbers of winged birds, has encroached upon its natural habitat.

The development has a debilitating impact on the oxbow shape lake leading to reduction in its size from its original 7,000-hectare expanse to just over 2,620 hectares. Standing ruined, the lake has now been deserted even by

migratory birds, which are now seeking other sites for breeding and resting purposes. It used to be home to several aquatic flora and fauna.

To add to the woes of this water body which was once sprawled over 7,000 hectares, is the construction of embankment on the near-by Burhi Gandak river that has choked the major water inlet to the wetland.

Poaching of migratory birds, once abundant in the area, further exacerbates the ecological imbalance and undermines conservation efforts.

It was first declared a protected area by the State government in 1986, and later, a sanctuary by the Central Government, to prevent poaching of birds. Oxbow lake like shape is typically crescent-shaped and



common features in floodplains and low-lying areas near rivers, like in the cases of this water body also famously known as Kanwar Lake. It is formed by meandering Gandak River. The site lies in

Indo-Gangetic plains of North Bihar which is one of the most productive flood-plains of the world and accommodates a large population. Intriguingly while the Centre identified it as Bihar's first

Ramsar Site in a bid to put it on the global map, tourists coming here express disappointment when they see the condition of the lake, which bears no resemblance to the descriptions they have read or heard about, according to reports.

Such has been the apathy of the authorities that despite being declared a protected area by the Bihar Government in 1986 and a bird sanctuary by the Centre in 1989, overall, there has been a large-scale reduction in wetlands in Bihar as low as 2620 hectares. Even though locals depend on farming, encroachment has been growing. Due to the encroachment of the wetland for agricultural practices, the Kabartal wetland's declining ecosystem is visible, as is the ongoing loss in the wetland area. Despite the proclamation of a

bird sanctuary, numerous birds have been designated as fragile or endangered negatively impact species, according to a study 'Kabartal (Kanwar) Lake: First Ramsar Wetland Site of Bihar' published in ResearchGate. It was presented at the 9th International Multidisciplinary Conference on Current Research Trends-2023, last year.

The authors of the article are Bijay Kumar Das, Associate Professor, Department of Architecture and Planning, NIT Patna, Khushbu Kumari, Independent researcher from Patna, Avi Kush, a Civil Engineering student from SMVDU, Katra, Jammu and Kashmir, Arpita Srivastav from Department of Architecture and Planning, NIT Patna, and Sumit Kumar, a wildlife photographer.

DM orders municipal commissioner to act in Swachhata Samiti scam

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Dehradun district magistrate Sonika ordered municipal commissioner Gaurav Kumar to take action against the people responsible for anomalies found in the alleged scam in the registration of fake sanitation workers under Mohalla Swachhata Samiti in the Municipal Corporation of Dehradun (MCD).

“Some other important points are also mentioned in the report. This is certainly a matter of investigation considering which, I have directed the Dehradun municipal commissioner to investigate the matter at his level,” she said. The corporation formed Mohalla Swachhata Samiti in 2019 to carry out works like sanitation and others regularly in all 100 wards.

five months ago that there are several irregularities regarding information about sanitation workers listed under the Samiti. When this matter reached the DM, she formed a committee under the CDO to investigate the matter. The CDO sought a report from MCD on the matter regarding several points.

Parental support needed for students undergoing exam result stress

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Parents should display a supportive attitude in order to help their children cope with the stress and shame that may arise from their not achieving satisfactory marks in board examinations, the experts said.

A CBSE counsellor as well as clinical neuropsychologist Dr. Sonika Kaushal Gupta said that the practice of some parents comparing their children, especially those who scored lower marks, with the toppers is a distressing trend.

encouragement from their parents,” she added. A Doon-based clinical psychologist Dr. Pratibha Sharma said that she encounters increasing cases of parents showing their children towards depression by indulging in the dangerous game of comparison and criticism.

Teacher arrested for molesting minor student

PNS ■ UTTARKASHI

Police arrested a teacher on Wednesday on the charge of molesting a minor girl student in a private school in Purola. They said they acted on the molestation complaint lodged at Purola police station.

the Indian Penal Code and 3/4 PCO Section Act. Taking a serious note of the crime, the superintendent of police, Uttarkashi, Arpan Yaduvanshi gave direction for immediate arrest of the accused. A team was formed under the supervision of the deputy superintendent of police, Badkot, Surendra

Singh Bhandari. Led by the head of the Purola police station Mohan Kathait, the team arrested the accused from a petrol pump in Purola. Kathait informed that the accused teacher is Rakesh aged 35 years. He was later sent to jail, he added.

CS directs depts to purchase certified products only

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief Secretary Radha Raturi has directed the government departments to purchase only the standardised and certified products. She said that the youngsters of the State should be encouraged to launch their start ups by making arrangements for training of management systems, certification, customisation and

quality. The CS gave these orders while chairing the fourth meeting of the State level committee on standardisation and quality of the industrial products of Uttarakhand at the State secretariat on Wednesday. She requested the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) to release its regular calendar regarding the

training and certification of products. Raturi said that capacity building of the State level officers for standardisation and certification should be done and awareness campaigns among students and at Panchayat level should be undertaken.

Truecaller introduces TrueTalks Community to connect users across globe

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Truecaller announced on Wednesday the launch of TrueTalks Community to engage with people across the world. The community serves as a platform to bring together Truecaller users to interact with each other, share

feedback, post suggestions for new features and get instant support with their problems among others, the Truecaller executives said. They further said that anyone, irrespective of whether he is a Truecaller user or not, can become a member of the community by signing up with a valid email address and display name. However, the Truecaller users can instantly access TrueTalks from a shortcut within the app.

training and certification of products. Raturi said that capacity building of the State level officers for standardisation and certification should be done and awareness campaigns among students and at Panchayat level should be undertaken.

GDMC hospital to expand parking area to end ordeal

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Taking note of the patients' concern regarding limited parking space, the administration of Government Doon Medical College (GDMC) hospital is planning to construct two more basement levels to expand the parking area. Many patients visiting the hospital have expressed their concern about the limited parking spaces available, forcing them to park their vehicles outside the hospital.

staffers, including the doctors, park their vehicles inside the parking space. So, the hospital administration should address this issue so that the patients and the staffers have enough space for parking vehicles,” she said. Asked to comment on the matter, the deputy medical superintendent at GDMC Hospital, Dr. Dhananjay Dobhal said that the patients' grievances on the parking ordeal were justified.

Bollywood producer hails U'khand's new film policy

PNS ■ UTTARKASHI

The noted Bollywood film producer Vipul Shah has applauded Uttarakhand's new film policy, terming it as film-friendly and convenient for producers and directors. He expressed his appreciation during a meeting with the joint chief executive officer of Uttarakhand Film Development Council Nitin Upadhyaya regarding his new film project to be shot in the State.

Shah mentioned that the new film policy for 2024 being implemented by the Uttarakhand government has created a buzz in Bollywood due to its favourable nature. He also stated his willingness to shoot his upcoming comedy suspense film entirely in Dehradun and Mussoorie. Shah's team will be in Uttarakhand for the next five days to scout shooting locations. Upadhyaya said that the State government is going all-out to make Uttarakhand an attractive shooting destination for filmmakers.

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Truecaller introduces TrueTalks Community to connect users across globe. Truecaller announced on Wednesday the launch of TrueTalks Community to engage with people across the world.

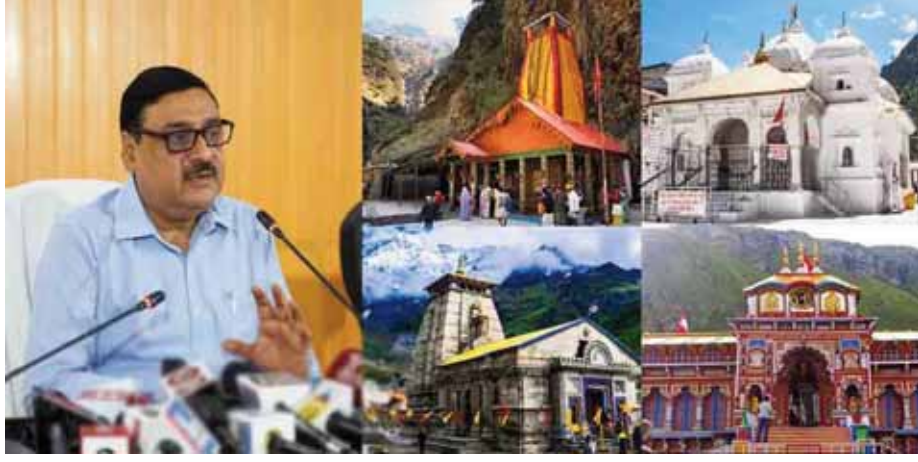
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# Char Dham Chaos - Administration to strictly regulate pilgrim movement

**PNS ■ DEHRADUN**  
Stung by the reports of mismanagement and massive traffic jams on the Char Dham Yatra routes, the State administration has swung into action to regulate the movement of pilgrims. The district magistrates (DM) of Chamoli, Rudraprayag, Uttarkashi, Pauri and Tehri have been directed to identify the holding points of pilgrims on the Yatra routes. The pilgrims will be kept at these holding points to ease the load in the shrines. The DMs and the RTOs have been asked to ensure that the pilgrims are visiting the shrines on the dates mentioned in their registrations. The Garhwal commissioner, Vinay Shankar Pandey told the media persons on Wednesday that an unprecedented arrival of the pilgrims is being witnessed in the Yatra this year. He said that last year 6,838 pilgrims visited Yamunotri shrine but this year the number increased to 12,193 on the first day. Similarly 29,000 pilgrims visited Kedarnath this year while last year 18,335 pilgrims were in the Dham on the first day. The capacity of Yamunotri and Kedarnath is 8,000 and 18,000 pilgrims per day.



Pandey said 26,73,519 pilgrims have registered online for the Yatra till Tuesday afternoon. Similarly 76,120 and 6,251 pilgrims have been registered in offline mode at Rishikesh and Haridwar. He said that many pilgrims whose registration is for later dates in May and for the month of June have embarked on the Yatra. Pandey said that DMs and the transport department have been asked to take strict punitive action on the owners of vehicles

transporting such pilgrims. The Garhwal commissioner informed that so far 1,26,306 pilgrims have paid their obeisance at Kedarnath, 59,158 at Yamunotri, 51,379 at Gangotri and 39,574 in Badrinath. He said that 11 pilgrims have died so far in the Yatra. Pandey appealed to the

pilgrims to consult their doctors before starting the Yatra and advised that those with co-morbidity should not come for the Yatra. He informed that the teams of the health department are engaged in health screening of the pilgrims who are more than 50 years of age.

## CM asks secretary Sundaram to camp in Uttarkashi

**PNS ■ DEHRADUN**

Taking cognizance of the huge rush of the pilgrims and reports of mismanagement the chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama has directed secretary R Meenakshi Sundaram to camp in Uttarkashi. Sundaram who also holds the charge of secretary

to chief minister will monitor the arrangements at Gangotri and Yamunotri shrines. He will remain in touch with district administration, Police and State administration to streamline the arrangements in Uttarkashi district.

## CS directs Transport dept to act against illegal vehicle operation on Char Dham routes

**PNS ■ DEHRADUN**

Considering the continuous rise in traffic on Char Dham routes, the Uttarakhand chief secretary Radha Raturi directed the Transport department to hold an immediate meeting with tour operators to prevent the operation of vehicles without registration. Stating that the operation of unregistered vehicles and those operating without trip cards are also causing traffic jams, she directed the department to ensure such vehicles are sent back. She directed them to take appropriate action by marking unregistered vehicles at checkpoints established at various places. The CS said that she will also send a letter to the chief secretaries and director generals of police of other states in this regard. She also directed the authorities to reg-

Dham registration, Raturi instructed the Health department to strictly focus on health screening of passengers aged above 50 years. The officials informed Raturi that the department has deployed 184 doctors on the Yatra route including 44 specialist doctors. The department has also started a Cath lab in Srinagar Medical College. A travel-related SOP has also been issued in a total of 11 languages. In order to address the problems of pilgrims on the spot, Raturi instructed the officials to take immediate appropriate action on the complaint of any devotee that they receive on their mobile phones. She directed them to keep their mobiles on all the time and compulsorily listen to the pilgrims' complaints. She also said that the



ister an FIR against those trying to defame Char Dham Yatra by spreading false propaganda about pilgrimage through fake news or videos. Considering the cases of some devotees who are not providing proper information about their medical history during Char

respective in-charge secretaries deployed in districts will regularly monitor the Yatra from the Secretariat itself through the respective district administrations and district magistrates and will take necessary actions by coordinating with the departments concerned.

## Vehicle carrying 18 pilgrims overturns near Gangotri highway

**PNS ■ DEHRADUN**

A vehicle carrying 18 pilgrims from Ahmedabad in Gujarat overturned ahead of Songad on the Gangotri National Highway on

passengers of the vehicle. The police sent them to the nearest hospital for treatment with the help of two ambulances. The officials said that the SDRF team



Wednesday. The pilgrims sustained minor injuries in the accident.

The pilgrims were heading for Gangotri Dham when the vehicle reportedly lost control and overturned near Songad ahead of Dhabrani on the highway, the officials said. They informed that the accident occurred around the afternoon and the rescue team of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) was called to the spot. The rescue team started the operation and rescued all 18

also handed over all the valuables and essential items of passengers found in the vehicle to the local police.

The said vehicle had a number plate of Haryana and was carrying pilgrims from Ahmedabad. The driver told the police the vehicle overturned due to sudden release of brakes and he lost control. The police will also question the pilgrims and will take further action accordingly in the matter, the officials added.

## Uttarakhand DGP seeks help of counterparts to regulate Char Dham rush

**PNS ■ DEHRADUN**

In view of the unexpected crowd rush at Char Dham shrines, the officiating director general of police Abhinav Kumar has requested his counterparts across the country to not send any VIPs from their respective states till May 31 for Yatra. He also said that the unprecedented figures of pilgrims within a few days of Char Dham Yatra are among the major causes of traffic jams on routes and heavy rush in shrines for Darshan. He said, "In view of the unexpected crowd at the Char Dhams, we have written a letter to the DGPs of all the states of the country and requested them not to send any VIP from

their respective states for the Char Dham Darshan till May 31." Talking about the severe traffic jams on Char Dham routes, he said that the rate of pilgrims visiting Char Dham shrines this year is quite high compared to the past five years. Considering this rate, the number of pilgrims might grow about 70 to 75 lakh this year which is quite an unprecedented figure. "All departments concerned are working together to regulate the traffic jams and crowds. All pilgrims arriving here are our guests but they should also consider the high number of pilgrims visiting a shrine in advance before making the plan to visit it. They

should understand that the police might have to stop their vehicles, divert them or send them back in case the journey could not be continued due to certain reasons. If a place is already overcrowded and there is no accommodation for pilgrims there, the police will not send them ahead. I appeal to the pilgrims to have some patience for their safety purposes," the DGP said. He has also ordered the Superintendent of Police of Rudraprayag, Chamoli and Uttarkashi to assess the prescribed capacity of the four Dhams as per scientific method and allow pilgrims' entry there accordingly.

## Char Dham warning: Traffic congestion and surging pilgrims impacting glaciers

**MANSI BHAMBRI ■ DEHRADUN**

The heightened traffic and surge in the number of pilgrims during the Char Dham Yatra-encompassing Kedarnath, Yamunotri, Gangotri and Badrinath-will have a substantial adverse impact on the local environment, particularly the glaciers, the experts opined. The Char Dham Yatra that began on May 10 this year is witnessing about a 60 per cent increase in the number of pilgrims as compared to last year. The experts warned that the congestion en route to Char Dham along with the loud music and sheer volume of pilgrims will not only affect the glaciers but also the rivers flowing in nearby regions.



Char Dham Yatra route directly impacts the glaciers with vehicle emissions altering their colour and leading to eventual melting. This, in turn, may result in deluge similar to what happened in Kedarnath in 2013," he said.

is to restrict the volume of traffic along the main routes of Char Dham Yatra. Additionally, instead of promoting it the way they are now doing, they should distinguish between regular tourism and the Char Dham pilgrimage," said Sati. Expressing the same concern, Assistant Professor, department of Geology, Doon University Rajeev Saran Ahluwalia said that increased traffic during the Char Dham Yatra might trigger irreversible damage to the environment, in general, and the glaciers, in particular. "The carbon emissions from vehicles directly affect the glaciers and accelerate their melting rate. The melting glaciers feed into nearby rivers causing adverse effects on wildlife, biodiversity and more. Additionally, noise pollution generated by vehicles as well as dust and drum beats could potentially trigger major landslides. To prevent further damage to the glaciers, the government should consider implementing a pooling system to reduce the traffic pressure during Char Dham Yatra," said Ahluwalia.

Further, Sati noted with concern instances of people playing drums and making loud noise at the commencement of the Yatra. "Apart from causing noise pollution, these actions contribute to vibrations that can lead to cracks and fragmentation in the glaciers. There is only one option left for the State government to steer clear of such disasters and that

at a fast pace on the development front. He said that Uttarakhand is known as Devbhoomi and is famous for Char Dhams, Adi Kailash and sacred rivers such as Ganga and Yamuna. Dhama said that Uttarakhand has become the first State to implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). The State has also implemented a stringent anti copying law, anti conversion law and

## Amid huge footfalls at Gangotri & Yamunotri, administrative regulation easing traffic chaos

**PNS ■ UTTARKASHI**

With the huge influx of Char Dham pilgrims continuing in Uttarakhand, a record number of 15,630 devotees reached Yamunotri Dham while 11,734 devotees arrived in Gangotri Dham on Wednesday. The traffic chaos that affected the Yatra on the initial days has become less grim due to the initiatives taken by the Uttarkashi district administration. Notably, the district magistrate Meharban Singh Bisht directed the officers deployed on the Yatra route to stay put in their respective sectors and help the Yatra go on hassle-free.

Jai Kishan inspected the Yatra control room and reviewed things along the Yatra routes through CCTV feed. They stressed that if there is difficulty in supplying water and food on four-wheelers, two-wheelers and even horses/mules should be used. Further, they directed the officers and departments concerned to take stern action against the traders overcharging the pilgrims.

points along the Gangotri route before they were allowed to move towards their next destinations. Similarly, along the Yamunotri route, 100 vehicles were held at Damta, 125 at Kharadi, 400 at Paligad, 300 at Kharsali and Janki Chhatti, 100 at Dobata and around 250 at Shiv Gufa and later were sent to the next destination in a phased and controlled manner.

According to the information received on Wednesday, around 1,000 vehicles at Gangotri, 50 at Nagun, 25 at Dharasu, 200 at Gangnani, 300 at Songad, 50 at Lanka and 150 at Harsil were held at certain holding

The district administration officers claimed that the administrative regulation of the pilgrims' movement on vehicles has started yielding positive results in easing the traffic snarl along the Yatra routes.

## Sole objective of INDI Alliance is to grab power for corruption: CM

**PNS ■ DEHRADUN**

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama has said that the only objective of the INDI Alliance is to come to power and engage in corruption. He was addressing a public meeting in support of BJP candidate Arvind Sharma in Rohtak, Haryana on Wednesday. He

abrogation of article 370 from Kashmir and ban on triple Talaq were taken in the last 10 years. Construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya was also done under leadership of PM Modi. The Uttarakhand CM said that the double engine government in Haryana is working

acted against land jihad. Dhama attacked the Congress party for engaging in politics of appeasement and encouraging dynastic politics. Cabinet minister of Rajasthan Sumit Godara, MP Bhagirath Chaudhary and other leaders also addressed the meeting.



said that in the last 10 years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has undertaken a Tapasya for the development of every person. The PM has dedicated every minute for the people due to which India is making rapid strides in every field.

Dhama said that many welfare schemes for the poor are operational under the leadership of PM Modi. He said that many historic decisions such as

## Dehradun Bar Association starts garnering support for shifting HC

**PNS ■ DEHRADUN**

The Bar Association, Dehradun has started a campaign for generating a public opinion for shifting the High Court (HC) to IDPL Rishikesh. A meeting of the general body of the association was held in Dehradun on Wednesday. In the meeting the recent decision of the chief Justice Ritu Bahari and Justice Rakesh Thapliyal in the Uttarakhand state versus Gulshan Bhanot case was welcomed.

The secretary of the Bar association, Rajbeer Singh Bisht said that responsibilities have been assigned to the advocates for encouraging the general public to register their opinion for shifting the HC on the portal of the Uttarakhand HC. He said that different committees of senior, junior and women advocates have been constituted for garnering support for shifting HC to IDPL Rishikesh.

In the decision the HC had asked to conduct an opinion poll on shifting the HC to IDPL Rishikesh.

The advocates also observed a no work day on Wednesday in support of their demand.

## UP CM's mother admitted at AIIMS-Rishikesh, stable

**PNS ■ DEHRADUN**

Following health problems related to old age, Savitri Devi, the mother of Uttar Pradesh (UP) chief minister Yogi Adityanath was admitted to All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Rishikesh on Tuesday. She is admitted in the Geriatrics ward of the institute and her health is said to be stable.

AIIMS Rishikesh, Dr Sanjeev Kumar Mittal said that Savitri Devi (80 years) was found to be suffering from high blood pressure in the check ups. He said that routine tests are being carried out on her. The Public Relations Officer (PRO) of AIIMS Rishikesh Sandeep Kumar Singh said that a team of doctors is conducting her check ups and monitoring her health.

The Medical Superintendent (MS) of the

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<b>Whereas</b>				
The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.				
As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.				
Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Aakash Goyal/ Deepak Goyal/ LBHW00005206460/ LBHW00005206461	Khasra No. 1590/2, Chor Gali, Mohalla Pandeywala, Village Jwalapur, Pargana, Haridwar, Uttarakhand- 249401/ May 14, 2024	January 18, 2024 Rs. 15,43,348/-	Haridwar
2.	Sagar Sahu/ Laxmi Devi/ LBHW00005110598	Nagar Nigam, Khata No. 418, Mohalla Maliyan, Jwalapur, Haridwar, Uttarakhand- 249407/ May 14, 2024	January 18, 2024 Rs. 10,48,812/-	Haridwar
The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.				
Date: May 16, 2024				
Place: Haridwar				
				Authorized Officer
				ICICI Bank Limited

# Deeply saddened: Centre condolences Indian UN worker's death in Gaza

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Wednesday condoled the death of an Indian who was working with the United Nations (UN) in war-torn Gaza. Colonel Waibhav Anil Kale (ret'd), a 46-year-old former Indian Army officer, was killed on Monday when the vehicle he was travelling in came under attack in Gaza's Rafah region. The United Nations condoled and expressed apologies to India over the killing.

The killing marks the UN's first international casualty since the Israel-Hamas war began last year. The UN has called for a full investigation into his death while Israel has ordered a separate probe into the attack. In its first official reaction, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said it is deeply saddened by Colonel Kale (ret'd)'s death.

"We are deeply saddened by the death of Colonel Waibhav Anil Kale (Ret'd.), Security Coordination Officer in the

UN Department of Safety and Security (DSS) in Gaza on 13 May 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and dear ones," said a statement.

The Indian permanent mission to the UN in New York and its missions in Tel Aviv and Ramallah are helping in bringing back the retired soldier's body, the ministry said. "Our Permanent Mission to the UN in New York and our Missions in Tel Aviv and Ramallah are extending all assistance in the repatriation of mortal remains to India and continue to be in touch with relevant authorities regarding the investigation into the incident," it added.

Colonel Kale (ret'd) had taken premature retirement from the Indian Army in 2022 and joined as a Security Coordination Officer in the UN Department of Safety and Security (DSS) two months ago, officials said yesterday. He is survived by his wife Amruta and two teenage children, son Vedant and daughter Radhika. The United Nations



GAZA WAR

condoled and expressed apologies to India over the killing of the former Indian Army officer. "We also express our apologies and our condolences to the Government and people of India," Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said at the daily press briefing on Tuesday, reports PTI from United Nations. "We appreciate the contribution that India has made," he said.

Haq said the UN has established a fact-finding panel to look into the deadly attack. "It's very early in the investigation, and details of the incident are still being verified with the Israeli Defence Force (IDF)," Haq said. The fact-finding mission is being set up by the Department of Safety and

Security. Haq said a weapon appears to have impacted the back of the white UN vehicle that was carrying the two UN staff members, killing Kale and injuring the other DSS female staff member who is receiving medical attention and "we believe that she will make it through."

"The deceased staff member has been identified. He is

Waibhav Anil Kale of India, and we send our condolences to his family," he said. Haq confirmed that this was the "first international casualty" for the UN in Gaza and added that currently, the world body has 71 international staff in Gaza.

When asked if the UN is in contact with Israeli officials regarding the attack, Haq replied in the affirmative and said, "I think the point is we are in discussion with Israel to determine exactly how this incident happened and the nature of what happened."

"I don't think at this stage we are in doubt about where the shots came from as much as what the circumstances were," he added.

Haq said the UN believes the shots came from a tank in the area. When asked that only the IDF have tanks in the region, Haq said, "I think that's a safe assumption to make, yes."

He said the convoy was going to the European hospital as "there's regular work that's going on in terms of bringing people to different sites and this

was part of that." When asked if Israel apologised to the UN and if the world body sees this as a deliberate attack, Haq said the case is "still under review". "We'll see what the review results in," he said, adding that "as the review proceeds, we'll need to see what the precise nature of the circumstances were."

The Permanent Mission of India to the UN had said in a post on X that it is "deeply saddened" by the loss of Col Waibhav Kale.

"Our deepest condolences are with the family during this difficult time," it said. UN chief Guterres expressed sadness to learn of Kale's death and injury to the other DSS staffer and condemned all attacks on UN personnel, calling for a full investigation.

Guterres sent his condolences to the family of the fallen staff member. "With the conflict in Gaza continuing to take a heavy toll — not only on civilians but also on humanitarian workers — the Secretary-General reiterates his urgent

appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the release of all hostages," Guterres said. He said that more than 190 UN staff have been killed in Gaza. "Humanitarian workers must be protected. I condemn all attacks on UN personnel and reiterate my urgent appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the release of all hostages," he said. Trinamool Congress MP Saket Gokhale on Wednesday wrote to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, urging that the government strongly condemn the killing of a former Indian Army officer in Gaza.

Gokhale said the former Army officer was travelling in a clearly-marked UN vehicle when he was killed. "It is clear from reports that Col.

Kale was killed when his convoy was attacked in a strike by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). There is well-established international law which prohibits military strikes on UN personnel in a conflict zone," he said in his letter to the minister.

# BJP, Congress spar over Modi's remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP and Congress on Wednesday sparred following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's that he will never do Hindu-Muslim politics to assert that he has worked for development of all sections of society with any discrimination.

While BJP leaders cited the Prime Minister's remarks and said he ended communal appeasement with his inclusive governance, Congress, however, claimed that the "outgoing PM" has had no agenda barring Hindu-Muslim politics as "Modi ki Guarantee" has "fallen flat" and '400 paar' given a "silent burial."

With the Congress and its allies accusing Modi of communal politics in his campaign, the prime minister had told a private television channel on Tuesday that he will not be fit for public life if he starts doing Hindu-Muslim. Former



Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said Modi ended communal appeasement with his inclusive governance, asserting that his numerous welfare schemes have benefited the poorest people without any caste, religious or regional biases. Even Modi's critics cannot deny that his schemes have benefitted everyone, the BJP leader said.

BJP spokesperson R P Singh claimed it was leaders of the

Congress and its allies which have spoken in favour of reservation for Muslims and strengthening personal laws, inviting a rejoinder from the prime minister. The Congress manifesto, he said, promises strengthening personal laws, alleging that it implies implementation of parts of sharia. RJD president Lalu Prasad Yadav has favoured reservation for Muslims, he added.

"The BJP's agenda is for the

country's advancement," Singh said, noting that the his party's manifesto for expanding health insurance, housing, water and electricity facilities and boosting infrastructure is meant for all sections of society. Slamming the prime minister, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the nation knows very well that "the outgoing PM is a pathological liar." "But even by his own pathetic standards, Mr. Modi's

latest claim that he does not do Hindu-Muslim politics shows the new depths he reaches daily in lying.

Since April 19th 2024, it is a matter of public record that cannot be erased from our collective memory - even if Mr. Modi erases it from his own - that the outgoing PM has blatantly and brazenly used communal language, symbols, and allusions," Ramesh charged on X.

Another BJP spokesperson Shah Nawaz Hussain said Modi has always considered over 140 crore population of the country as one, and it is the opposition which has tried to stick "Hindu-Muslim" charge on to him. "Modi has never done politics in the name of Hindu-Muslim," he said. The issue had taken the centre stage following his speech in Rajasthan last month, in which he had attacked the Congress over its alleged agenda for redistribution of wealth and Muslim reservation.

Modi said he was shocked at such an allegation and had cited his government numerous welfare measures aimed at saturation in their reach to make his point. Ramesh, however, alleged that throughout this campaign, "the outgoing PM" has had no agenda barring Hindu-Muslim politics. His party's manifesto, an incoherent jumble of words amidst an array of his own photos, has found zero traction, the Congress leader claimed.

"Modi ki Guarantee, promoted at tremendous cost to the public exchequer for the last few months, has fallen flat. 400 Paar has been given a silent burial," Ramesh said.

"His last, desperate attempt at having a campaign has been to lie and spread untruths about the Congress Party's and the INDIA jantandhan's agenda for equitable growth for each and every Indian citizen," he said. "The certainty of his exit has now forced him to feign memory loss," Ramesh added.

# EC summons Andhra chief secretary, DGP over post poll violence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Taking cognisance of post-poll violence in Andhra Pradesh, the Election Commission (EC) of India has summoned the State's chief secretary and the DGP on Thursday to "personally explain" the administration's failure to contain the incidents, sources said.

Reminding the state government that the Model Code of Conduct is still in force, the EC also asked the chief secretary and the police chief to ensure such incidents are not repeated. The Commission has repeatedly emphasised that there is no place for violence in a democracy and since the announcement of Lok Sabha elections, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar

has been personally monitoring the election space to ensure peaceful and violence-free conduct of polls, officials pointed out.

When they appear at the EC headquarters here on Thursday, the top Andhra Pradesh officials will be asked to "personally explain" the reasons for the administration's failure to contain the post-poll violence, the sources said.

They will also be asked about preemptive steps being taken to avoid any such incidents in the future, the sources said. Post-poll violence was reported in parts of Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday where Lok Sabha and assembly polls were held together on Monday. The leaders of ruling YSRCP and opposition TDP have levelled allegations against each other for the incidents.

# India urges Iran to release 40 Indian seafarers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has asked Iran to release nearly 40 Indian seafarers who were detained from four different merchant ships seized by the Persian Gulf country over the past eight months on different charges, sources said on Wednesday.

Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Sarbananda Sonowal made the request during a meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in Tehran on Monday.

Sonowal was in Tehran where India signed a 10-year contract to operate the strategic Iranian port of Chabahar that will help expand the trade with Central Asia.

Following a request of Iranian side, a meeting was held between Sonowal and Abdollahian where bilateral issues were discussed, sources privy to the development said. During the meeting, Sonowal requested Abdollahian to



release all Indian seafarers who are in Iranian custody. Abdollahian said Tehran is positive on the release of the Indian seafarers but it is getting delayed as legal procedures have to be followed, the sources said.

The sources said the Indian seafarers were working in four ships -- Steven, Global Cherylyn, Margol and MSC Aries -- which were seized by Iran over the past eight months on different charges. According

to the sources, Steven was seized by the Iranian Coast Guard on September 12, 2023, for "smuggling" and the crew were also detained.

There were nine Indian crew members on board and it has come down to six now after three of them, along side two other nationals, were taken away by Iranian authorities on April 24 and their whereabouts are still unknown.

Iran is yet to give consular access to the Indian seafarers of

the ship and the Indian Embassy in Tehran is in regular touch with Iranian authorities, the sources said. Another ship, Global Cherylyn, was seized on December 11, 2023 at Bandar Abbas with 20 Indian crew members and one Bangladeshi.

Consular access to the crew was given on March 12, 2024. The vessel was seized on charges of "fuel smuggling". The issue was raised with the Iranian Embassy and authorities in Tehran.

According to the latest update, the release orders of the seafarers have been signed by a local court but final release depends on the approval of a court in Tehran.

Another vessel, Margol, was seized on January 22, 2024. It has currently one Indian, the vessel's captain Sujet Singh. So far, consular access has not been given. The vessel was seized on charges of "fuel smuggling". The ship's 12 Indian crew were already released and they reached

Delhi on February 14. A penalty of Rs 20 crore was imposed on the captain by the Iranian authorities.

Shipping company RPSL is in touch with the Iranian authorities and they have assured the release of the captain by this month. Merchant ship MSC Aries was seized on April 13, 2024 by Iran for its alleged links with Israel.

There were 17 Indian crew. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke to his Iranian counterpart on April 14 for the release of Indian crew members. Following the conversation, Indian female deck cadet Ann Tessa Joseph was released and she landed in Kochi on April 18, 2024. On May 9, five more Indian sailors of MSC Aries were released by Iran.

India has requested the Iranian side for the early release of the remaining Indian crew members of the ship. The Indian embassy is in touch with Iranian authorities and has requested for second consular access, the sources said.

# India sees highest heatwave deaths globally from 1990 to 2019: Study

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

India shouldered the highest burden of heatwave-related excess deaths globally accounting for more than 20 per cent of the total 1.53 lakh such mortalities surpassing both China and Russia in this aspect in the last three decades from 1990 to 2019.

A research conducted by Australia-based Monash University said that the impact of heat waves on India is particularly severe due to a combination of geographical, climatic, and socioeconomic factors. In contrast, China and Russia, each experienced roughly 14 per cent and 8 per cent of these heat-wave-linked excess deaths, respectively.

Overall, more than 1.53 lakh deaths a year were associated with heat waves around the world. The study found that heatwave-linked excess deaths accounted for about a third of all heat-related deaths and 1 per cent of total deaths globally. Needless to say, overall 1.53 lakh excess deaths occurred every summer, close to half came from Asia and more than 30 per cent from Europe.

Further, the largest estimated death rates (deaths per population) were seen in regions with dry climates and lower-middle incomes. The findings are published in PLoS Medicine.

The high incidence of heatwave-related mortality in India is reflective of several factors, including the country's large population, its geographical location, and the prevalence of extreme temperatures, particularly during the summer months.

Additionally, socioeconomic factors such as poverty, inadequate access to healthcare, and limited infrastructure exacerbate the vulnerability of certain segments of the population, particularly those living in urban slums or rural areas with limited resources. The authors explained that "During the warm seasons from 1990 to



2019, heatwave-related excess deaths accounted for 153,078 deaths per year, a total of 236 deaths per ten million residents or 1 per cent of global deaths." For the study, the researchers used data from the UK-based Multi-Country Multi-City (MCC) Collaborative Research Network that included daily deaths and temperatures from 750 locations across 43 countries including India.

Comparing the decade up to 2019 with that up to 1999, the duration of heat waves each year was found to have extended from 13.4 to 13.7 days on average around the world, with average ambient temperature warming by 0.35 degrees Celsius every decade.

The researchers said that while previous studies have quantified excess deaths due to heat waves locally, they have not compared these estimates across the globe over a prolonged duration.

The authors have called for a "comprehensive approach" tackling not only immediate health risks during heat waves but also implementing long-term strategies to minimise vulnerability and inequalities across communities. "The strategies include climate change mitigation policy, heat action plans (e.g., heat early

warning system), urban planning and green structure, social support program, healthcare and public health services, education awareness, and community engagement and participation," they said.

The study echoes findings of a recent report by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) which said in India alone, severe heat waves in April and June resulted in about 110 reported fatalities due to heatstroke in 2023.

Yet another analysis by an international team of leading climate scientists from the World Weather Attribution group has called for urgent measures to mitigate the impact of heat waves which are likely to intensify in coming years.

"Some countries, such as India, have comprehensive heat action plans in place. Yet, to protect some of the most vulnerable people, these must be expanded with mandatory regulations."

Workplace interventions for all workers to address heat stress, such as scheduled rest breaks, fixed work hours, and rest-shade-rehydrate programs (RSH), are necessary but have yet to become part of worker protection guidelines in the affected regions," it said.

# SAARC Secretary General holds talks to boost regional cooperation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Secretary General of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Md Golam Sarwar paid an official visit to India from May 11-15 and interacted with the authorities of the government on issues of cooperation in SAARC. It was Secretary General's first official visit to any of the Member States of SAARC. Giving details here, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said during the visit, the Secretary General was hosted for a working lunch by Jaideep Majumdar, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs. The two sides had detailed discussions on vari-



ous issues of regional cooperation within SAARC. Following this, the Secretary General also called on the Foreign Secretary and Minister of State for External Affairs Rajkumar Ranjan Singh. During the discussions, India reiterated its commitment towards regional cooperation for growth and prosperity of the people of South Asia through SAARC. It was also underlined that India con-

siders SAARC as an important regional association for cooperation in South Asia and has been taking several efforts and initiatives to bring the peoples of South Asia closer to each other. The Secretary General also visited the South Asian University (SAU) which is a specialised body of SAARC hosted by India in New Delhi and discussed with its authorities issues concerning the University.

# Not necessary to make arrest in all GST cases: SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday told the Centre that there is no need for making arrests in all Goods and Services Tax (GST) cases and that it can be done only if there is credible evidence and tangible material to prove culpability.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna, MM Sundresh and Bela M Trivedi, which reserved its verdict on a batch of pleas challenging the constitutional validity and interpretation of provisions relating to the Customs Act and Goods and Services Tax Act, said the power of arrest is different from necessity of arrest. "The legislation does not say that for

completion of investigation you need to be arrested. It is not the object of the legislation. It is not necessary for you to arrest in each and every case of GST.

It has to be based on some credible evidence and tangible material," the bench told Additional Solicitor General SV Raju. The bench, which posed several questions to Raju on provisions of arrest under the GST law, said the legislation has itself kept liberty on a high pedestal and it should not be diluted.

Raju said arrests are mostly made during the investigation as there can be no arrest after the probe in a case has been completed.

# This election is to punish those who are anti-Ram: BJP chief Nadda

**PTI ■ MOTIHARI (BIHAR)**

Launching a scathing attack on opposition INDIA bloc, BJP national president JP Nadda on Wednesday said this election is about holding those accountable who oppose the core values of 'Ram', nationalism, reservation, Sanatan Dharma and the Constitution and hinder the Centre's mission to make India 'Viksit Bharat'.

He accused the opposition leaders, including RJD, of misleading the electorate in the name of providing employment to youths. "They will first take the land of the poor before giving them jobs. If anyone can do good for the poor, then it's only the NDA government at the Centre led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi," said Nadda while addressing an election rally here in support of Lovely Anand, the NDA nominee from Sheohar Lok Sabha constituency. The allusion was apparently to the land-for-jobs scam during RJD supremo's tenure as the railway minister in the



Manmohan Singh government. The scam is currently being probed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). "When Sonia Gandhi was the chairperson of UPA, she had raised questions of the existence of Lord Ram and the then government gave an affidavit in the court terming him as fiction (imaginary). This election is to punish those who are anti-Ram, anti-national, anti-reservation, anti-Sanatan Dharma and against the Constitution. This election is also to punish

those who are opposing the Centre's initiatives to make India a 'Viksit Bharat', Nadda said. "Tamil Nadu minister Udhayanidhi Stalin had denigrated Sanatan Dharma as dengue, malaria etc. No Congress leader condemned his statement. They are anti-Sanatan Dharma," said Nadda. Nadda said the party led by Lalu Prasad stands for 'Rishwatkhori Jungleraj Dal'. He accused the opposition coalition of "protecting" corrupt people, whereas

Modi was "striving hard" to end corruption in the country. "A majority of the leaders of the INDIA bloc, including those of the Congress and RJD, are either in jail or out on bail," he added. "We have a PM who is working for the country and on the other hand, you have the INDIA bloc, a 'parivar bachao, dynasty bachao' alliance," he said and alleged that Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Lalu Prasad and Tejashwi Yadav are all out on bail. Reiterating that the BJP-led NDA will win 400-plus Lok Sabha seats, including all 40 in Bihar, Nadda asserted that the eastern state has developed only under NDA rule. "Bihar is also likely to get Rs 3 lakh-crore aid from the Centre for its overall development," he said. "Modi's only aim is welfare of every person. But INDIA bloc leaders want to give reservation on religious lines. The Congress is giving tickets to those belonging to 'tukde-tukde' gang," Nadda added.

# Congress making false promises to win LS polls: BJP

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

The BJP on Wednesday accused the Congress of making "false promises" to win the Lok Sabha elections after the main opposition party president Mallikarjun Kharge announced that if the INDIA bloc is voted to power, it will double the quantity of free rations provided by the BJP government to the poor. "Kharge is lying," senior BJP leader Arjun Ram Meghwal, who is also a Union minister, told reporters here when asked to comment on the Congress president's promise. "They want to come to power by making false promises. The people will not forgive them and believe in what they say," he added. Addressing a joint press conference here with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav in Lucknow earlier in the day, Kharge announced that the INDIA bloc will double the quantity of free rations provided by the BJP government to the

poor if voted to power. The Congress president referred to the Modi government's scheme providing five kilograms of ration to the poor every month and said, "The Congress brought the Food Security Act, you (Modi government) did nothing." "You are giving five kg. If INDIA bloc government is formed, we will give 10 kg of ration to the poor," Kharge said, adding "I am saying this with guarantee because we have already done it in the states, including Telangana and Karnataka." Hitting out at Kharge, Meghwal alleged that the Congress did not fulfil the promises it made to the people of Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka when it came to power in these states. "I come from Rajasthan. They made a false promise of waiving off the farmers' loans. They made false promises in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka as well," he charged.

# Grand temples will also be built in Mathura and Kashi if BJP wins 400 seats: Assam CM

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said here that grand temples will also be built in Mathura and Kashi if the BJP wins 400 seats. "The BJP government had promised the Ram temple (in Ayodhya) and the government kept the promise. The BJP government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has fulfilled all the promises," Sarma further said addressing a public meeting in support of BJP candidate Harsh Malhotra in Laxmi Nagar. Sarma also said that the vice president should take suo motu cognisance of the incident with AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's official residence. "There was an earlier allegation that a Delhi chief secretary was beaten by Kejriwal. Yesterday, he also thrashed a Rajya Sabha MP. I think the vice president, who is also the chairman of the Rajya Sabha, should take suo motu cognisance of how a chief minister can beat a Rajya Sabha MP," Sarma told reporters. Maliwal on Monday went to



the Civil Lines Police Station and alleged that a member of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's personal staff "assaulted" her at the chief minister's official residence, police officials said. Attacking the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Sarma said, "The Lal Qila (Red Fort) and the Qutub Minar are the main attractions of the capital, but the CM of Delhi invites people to show Mohalla Clinics, which are in bad conditions." He further said that medical colleges are being built in every district of Assam, and if the BJP is voted to power again, the government will build super-specialty hospitals and medical colleges in the national capital. Local MLA Abhay Verma, deputy president of Delhi BJP Lata Gupta and many other BJP leaders and workers were present during the meeting.

# Congress leader joins BJP in Chandigarh

**PTI ■ CHANDIGARH**

Senior Congress leader and former Chandigarh mayor Subhash Chawla on Wednesday joined the BJP here. Chawla expressed his dissatisfaction with the Congress-AAP coalition in Chandigarh, citing its detrimental effects on the grand old party's standing in the city. "Leaving the party, which I joined at the age of 21, was a harsh decision for me to take. However, I cannot ignore the damage AAP's presence inflicted on Congress in the recent municipal corporation election," said Chawla, who has also served as president of Congress' Chandigarh wing. "AAP is a party which indulges in petty politics. And Congress's decision to join hands with AAP for the Lok Sabha seat will destroy its presence in the union territory," he added. The former mayor was welcomed into the party fold by BJP national vice president Saroj Pandey, the party's Chandigarh Lok Sabha candidate Sanjay Tandon and Chandigarh BJP chief Jitender Pal Malhotra, according to a party statement.

# Lack of industry, migration of skilled workforce main issues in Kendrapara Lok Sabha seat

**PTI ■ KENDRAPARA**

Lack of industries, unemployment and migration of skilled workforce are the main issues in Kendrapara Lok Sabha constituency in coastal Odisha from where BJP national vice president Baijayant Panda is contesting against BJD's Anshuman Mohanty. Kendrapara parliamentary constituency has sent a galaxy of political heavyweights including late Biju Patnaik and former Lok Sabha Speaker Rabi Ray to the Lok Sabha in the past. This time, the fight is mainly between Panda and Mohanty with Sidharth Swarup Das of Congress also in the fray. Elections to the Kendrapara Lok Sabha constituency will be held on June 1. This coastal region is primarily an agrarian belt with people largely dependent on farming for sustenance. The district, despite sending several political heavyweights to Lok Sabha and state Assembly, still does not figure in the industrial map though the Naveen Patnaik government in December last year had approved ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel's proposal to set up a Rs 1,02,275 crore worth mega steel project at Mahakalpara

block of Kendrapara district. Migration of skilled workforce is a common factor here as employment opportunities here are few and far. The skilled plumbers from this region have made their presence felt across the globe. The plumbers are much sought-after for their workmanship and dexterity. Exodus of plumbers to overseas is a recurring phenomenon. Just like nurses from Kerala, Kendrapara plumbers are much in demand in Gulf countries for their professional approach to work. The region, home to Bhitarkanika National Park and Olive Ridley turtle habitat of Gahirmatha marine sanctuary, virgin beaches, is yet to be utilized for ecotourism-related economy. "I know for sure; there will be no visible change whoever wins. Kendrapara will remain the same as it was... Though there has been improvement in infrastructure in the form of road infrastructure, river bridges and rail lines, employment opportunities elude the youths here," rued an elderly voter from Kendrapara town, Subhash Chandra Mohanty. Panda, an industrialist was elected to Lok Sabha twice from the Kendrapara seat in 2009 and 2014 on BJD ticket. He was also a two-time BJD

Rajya Sabha MP from 2000 to 2009. Panda was suspended from the Naveen Patnaik-led BJD before the 2019 Lok Sabha polls on charges of anti-party activities and later he resigned from the party as well from Lok Sabha. Panda lost to BJD's Anubhav Mohanty by a margin of 1,81,483 votes in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Mohanty, a Congress deserter and former MLA had joined the BJD days before the polls. The Congress candidate Das is a political greenhorn with zero experience in Vidhan Sabha or Lok Sabha election. The poll fight, according to observers, will be principally between BJP's Panda and BJD's Mohanty, son of veteran politician late Nalinikanta Mohanty who was expelled from BJD in 2000 by CM Naveen Patnaik. The Aul, Mahakalpada, Rajnagar, Kendrapara, Patkura, Kisannagar and Mahanga Assembly segments constitute the Kendrapara Lok Sabha constituency spread across Kendrapara district with parts in Cuttack district. Significantly, all the Assembly seats coming under the parliamentary constituency were bagged by the BJD. The parliamentary constituency is home to 17,91,112 voters including 42,181 first-time voters. It has 9,26,275 male voters and 8,64,837 female.

# Himachal: Poll officers traverse tough terrains to make each vote count

**PTI ■ SHIMLA**

Each vote counts, and the truism is not lost on the polling officers, some of whom take the long precarious road to bring democracy to the far-flung and frugally populated areas, such as Bara Bhargal of Himachal Pradesh, which has all of 63 voters. The journey involves trekking for two days on a perilous mountain path, braving several landslide-prone stretches, and avoiding falling into the imperious Ravi River, which flanks the road.

Located in Kangra district, Bara Bhargal has little to offer in way of comfort in everyday life, and conducting elections should not be an exception. Just so any weather caprice does not thwart the polling, the election office sends two teams via two different routes to Bara Bhargal - one team is airdropped in the area in Baijnath and the other treks for two days on foot. Another area which tests the mettle of polling officers is Sat Kuthera of Fatehpur,

where it takes a 5.5 km boat ride to reach the polling station. Dr Surjit Saroch, a polling officer who was part of a team in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, told PTI how he took journey to Bara Bhargal five years ago. "Starting from Chamba side, we commenced our journey on foot from Naya Gram and reached Dharari, the only village en route to Bara Bhargal, and stayed in a small two-room kachha house in the village," he said. The team, which included porters and mules, walked for two days on the

hazardous narrow footpath with a bellowing Ravi River flowing beneath and shooting stones rolling down from the hilltop, Saroch recalled. Rakesh Chandel, the polling officer who supervised the assembly polls in Bara Bhargal in 2022, said he felt he had left the world behind when he reached the area. "With solar panels being the only mode of electricity and no communication devices except the satellite phone given to the polling officer, we felt we were cut off from the rest of the world," he said.

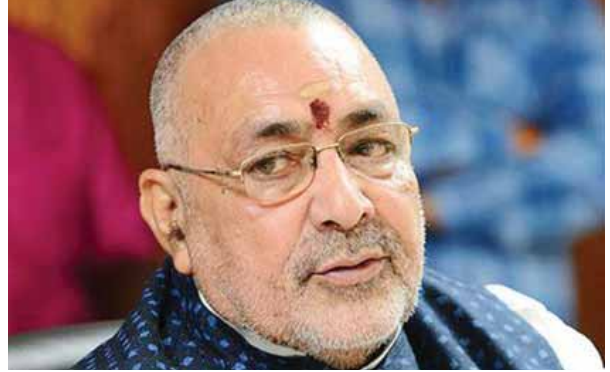
# Over 30 police personnel from Assam, on election duty in Bihar, injured in accident

**PTI ■ MUZAFFARPUR**

More than 30 personnel of the Assam Police, on election duty in Bihar, were injured on Wednesday when their bus collided head-on with a truck in Muzaffarpur district, a senior official said. Senior Superintendent of Police Rakesh Kumar said the accident took place in Sakra police station area on a national highway. Thirty-six personnel of the Assam Police, who were deputed in Samastipur where polls were held on Monday,

were travelling on the bus. They were on their way to Saran, where voting is scheduled next week, said the SSP. "On NH-28, the bus crashed into a truck coming from the opposite side. The impact of the collision caused many to be thrown off the bus, smashing the window panes," said the police officer. The driver of the truck was also severely injured in the mishap, said the SSP, adding that all the wounded persons have been rushed to local hospitals.

# Tejashwi is making baseless statements out of nervousness: Giriraj



**PTI ■ PATNA**

A day after RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav claimed that he was getting "full support" from "uncle" Nitish Kumar, senior BJP leader and Union Minister Giriraj Singh on Wednesday said the former is making "baseless statements out of his nervousness". "After completion of four phases of LS polls in the country, leaders of INDI alliance have realised that they are going to face a humiliating defeat in this polls. The NDA under PM Narendra Modi and CM Nitish Kumar will win 400 plus seats in the country and all 40 Lok Sabha seats in Bihar. RJD leader (Tejashwi Yadav) is nervous now. He is making these baseless statements out of his 'nervousness' only," said Singh. The BJP leader, who is seeking re-election from Begusarai Lok Sabha seat, made the remark when journalists sought his views on former deputy CM Tejashwi Yadav's claim that he was getting "full support" from "uncle" Nitish Kumar. Yadav on Tuesday claimed that he was getting "full support" from "uncle" Nitish Kumar, the JD(U) president who is a BJP ally, in his fight against the saffron party. He said, "chacha (uncle) may have been hijacked by the BJP. But he taught me the importance of driving out of power those whose ascent came in 2014. Deep down, he retains the sentiment". "I know his blessings are with me because I am carrying forward his fight. Just take

note, he has taken ill on the very day Prime Minister Narendra Modi was to file his nomination papers. It is clear I am getting his full support", Yadav had remarked. Further commenting on Yadav's reaction on PM Modi's roadshow in Patna on May 12 that INDIA coalition will do a 'job show' if it is voted to power, Singh said, "What sort of jobs he (Yadav) is talking about...The RJD can do 'jungle raj show', 'extortion show' and 'corruption show', and nothing else." Reacting to the Union minister's comment, Yadav told reporters here on Wednesday, "Whatever he (Giriraj Singh) is saying is baseless. There is no need to react to such things." Further attacking the PM, Yadav said, "I must tell you people that since Modi ji is going to turn 75 very soon. He must retire at the age of 75. He has decided 75 years as the age for retirement in the BJP for an elected representative. He must join his party's 'Margdarshak Mandal' of senior leaders." "Our youth is bearing the brunt of Modi government's pathetic apathy... ever-rising unemployment has destroyed their future. Around 25 crore youth in the country are now over-aged due to lack of employment policy of the Central government. Besides, what Agniveers will do who will retire at the age of 23? Therefore, Modi Ji, who can't think for the welfare of the country and youths, should join Margdarshak Mandal," Yadav added.

# Bongaon: Muslims divided over CAA narrative in Matua bastion

**PTI ■ BONGAON (WB)**

In the Matua stronghold of Bongaon, considered the cradle of the citizenship movement that shaped the CAA, there's a diverse array of beliefs, aspirations, and divisions within the Muslim community. The Matuas, a Hindu refugee community originally from East Bengal (now Bangladesh), has long been a dominant force in Bongaon's socio-political landscape. With their roots deeply entrenched in the struggle for citizenship rights, the CAA represents a beacon of hope, promising a pathway to citizenship for persecuted Hindu minorities from neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The Indo-Bangla border region, characterised by lush fields and tight-knit communities, is currently experiencing a notable split as political parties adopt contrasting positions on contentious issues, with apprehensions of NRC looming large. Juxtaposed against this narrative, Bongaon's Muslim population faces uncertainty regarding the CAA, adding to their challenges. While some see it (CAA) as a compassionate Act to help persecuted minorities, others regard it as a means of discrimination, worsening



already existing socio-religious tensions. "What is the need for CAA when all of us are citizens here. How come we can cast our votes and have all necessary documents," said 62-year-old Amirul Mondal of Mallickpur village along the Indo-Bangla border in Bongaon. Mintu Rahman, a weathered farmer with hands calloused from years of toil, voiced the fears of many. "Why target Muslims," he questioned, "When their roots run deep

into the soil of this motherland? It is discriminatory that in CAA, Muslims have been omitted. All religions should have been allowed under the Act," he said. The schism within Muslim community in Bongaon is palpable, mirroring the broader national discourse surrounding CAA. On one end of the spectrum are those who vehemently oppose the Act, viewing it as an assault on the secular fabric of the nation. They

argue that the CAA, by explicitly excluding Muslims, contravenes the principles of equality enshrined in the Constitution, thereby marginalising an already vulnerable community. Conversely, there are Muslims in Bongaon who, albeit reluctantly, express tacit support for CAA. Their rationale stems from a pragmatic assessment of the socio-political landscape, where aligning with the dominant narrative might offer a semblance of security and acceptance. "CAA is for persecuted minorities from neighbouring countries. The Act is about giving citizenship and not taking it away. Muslims like us who have been living here for generations are citizens of this country," Amirul Dafadar told PTI. Amirul, BJP's booth president of Sayestnagar in Bongaon, has been tediously reaching out to every Muslim households in his area trying to apprise people about the "negative campaign" going on over CAA. "It is the TMC which is instigating the Muslims against the CAA. They are misleading them," he said. Moidul Sheikh echoed similar sentiments, emphasising that as long as their identity and citizenship remained unquestioned, people from the community should not worry about the Citizenship

Amendment Act (CAA) as much as they did about the NRC in Assam. "If our rights and status are secure, there is no need for undue concern regarding the CAA. We are opposed to NRC but not against CAA," he said. However, this support is often accompanied by a sense of apprehension, as they grapple with the moral implications of endorsing a policy that appears to "disenfranchise their community". "Many people say that we are going against our community but it is not about opposing or supporting anything. It is about a humane approach," Moidul Sheikh said. The recent enactment of the CAA has sparked fears of a potential NRC exercise that could leave many in the Muslim community vulnerable to statelessness. "With the implementation of the CAA, there is a looming fear that the NRC might follow suit, subjecting us to scrutiny and uncertainty about our citizenship status," Bapan Sheikh said, echoing the sentiments of many in Bongaon. A large section of Muslim residents fear that they may face similar challenges in proving their citizenship, especially considering the lack of documentation. "As Muslims are persecuted minorities, they have all their documents in place. They are

very thorough about their documentation. In Assam also, we had witnessed a similar situation where more Hindus got omitted than Muslims," political analyst Moidul Islam said. Mahitosh Baidya, general secretary of All India Matua Mahasangha, conceded that there is seething anger and confusion among a section of Muslims over CAA. The Matuas, who are SC along with refugees, constitute around 70 per cent of the approximately 19 lakh electorate of Bongaon, an SC-reserved seat. The minorities comprise nearly 25 per cent of the electorate. "The BJP is playing a dangerous game in the name of the hoax called CAA. They are dividing the communities for own political gains," senior TMC leader of Bongaon district Ratan Ghosh told PTI. The Muslims in this constituency have traditionally voted for the TMC in the last few elections. BJP MLA from Haringhata in the constituency Asim Sarkar said the TMC is trying to vitiate the atmosphere by playing a communal card. The TMC knows they will lose in Bongaon that is why they are creating this narrative of NRC after CAA. We have communicated to educated Muslims that CAA in no threat to them," he said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Eating gold

Already costly, food items to be dearer on the back of heatwave, poll expenditures

With wholesale inflation hitting a 13-month high of 1.26 per cent in April and the mercury poised to peak in the next two months, stubbornly rising food prices are worrying many a family across the nation. This rise was driven as both food and fuel became dearer. Interestingly, India's retail inflation, measured by the consumer price index (CPI), fell to an 11-month low of 4.83 per cent year-on-year in April 2024, compared to 4.85 the previous month. The Reserve Bank of India primarily considers retail inflation when formulating monetary policy. However, for the average person, the rise in WPI is concerning as it is primarily influenced by food items, both processed and unprocessed, as well as manufactured goods. India is experiencing an ongoing heatwave, which is expected to affect vegetable prices. WPI inflation is forecast to increase to 2-3 per cent in May 2024; it is expected to spiral up and reach its peak in June 2024. WPI food inflation, which includes primary food articles and manufactured food items,



increased for the third consecutive month to an eight-month high of 5.5 per cent in April (compared to 0.4 per cent in April 2023), driven by both manufactured food products (reaching a 15-month high of 1.2 per cent) and primary food articles (reaching a four-month high of 7.7 per cent).

The increase in WPI inflation in April was attributed mainly to fuel and food items. However, there is a silver lining as the outlook for food inflation has improved due to expectations of a normal monsoon, which is anticipated to boost agricultural production. Additionally, commodity prices have rebounded on hopes of increased demand from China. Since it is an election

year, there is an automatic push to prices based on market speculation and uncertainty over continuation of governance policies, not to mention that the cost of election is recovered from the common man via higher prices. The funding of political parties by corporates and traders often reflects in the spiralling prices, pre- and post-elections. Logistic bottlenecks, labour shortages and increased transportation costs, thanks to oil prices, all contribute to the overall inflationary pressures, amplifying the challenges faced by food producers and consumers alike. Amid the backdrop of escalating food prices, election discussions revolve around economic policies and their impact. High prices and employment concerns loom large as hot topics, reflecting the broader sentiment of economic anxiety among voters. Generally, the ruling party bears the brunt of inflation as people hold it responsible for not keeping the prices in check. Effectively managing inflation entails employing a comprehensive strategy that harmonises short-term interventions with enduring structural changes. Swift actions, like directed subsidies and mechanisms for stabilising prices, can provide temporary respite to consumers contending with rising food expenses. Until that happens, we can happily fulfil our tax obligations by paying through our nose. Indeed, inflation is taxation without legislation!

### PICTALK



BSF personnel with a youth cycle rally to raise awareness for water, education and clean environment, in Dinajpur

## Embracing the joys and wisdom of age

Amidst serene nature, I pondered time's fleeting nature and shifting age perspectives, inspired by three chance encounters

I spent a memorable week in the mountains last year. Crisp and importantly clean mountain air, long walks along jungle trails, beautiful sunrises and sunsets and views of snow-capped peaks in the distance, were only a few of the bonuses that the place offered.

It was during this trip that three different people, in their way, tried to put us at ease, by referring to the facilities that they offered for the comfort of senior citizens. I would have bristled indignantly at a reference to my advancing age until only a couple of years back. Now I was not offended.

I remember an incident about 25 years back. One evening, a younger engineer, recruited through campus placement and working with me, remarked, "Sir, I am amazed by your energy. You work so hard and such long hours even at this age."

At 40, I could not take the Statement as a compliment that he had intended it to be and quipped rather caustically, "What do you mean



by this age? I am still young." I would love to see his face today if someone were to remark to him about his age. I completed 60 five years back. That was the time I realised the benefits that I was entitled to as I booked my air or train ticket at a discount. I could conveniently travel in the metro trains sitting comfortably on the seats meant for seniors, till someone older than me, or at least someone who looked older than me, came and stood near

me. Old habits die hard. I would offer my seat to the more needy or gallantly offer the seat to a much younger woman since that is what I was taught. But chivalry still had limits. I was not prepared to be called an old man or even an uncle by the younger people. Till we faced the onslaught of something terrible four years back - covid. It invaded our lives like nothing we had witnessed in our lifetime. I too had my share of the dread that many might have

undergone during their last living moments. We understood the fragility of life. Many, much younger, did not make it through the nights. I did and realised the privilege of being called old. Many will never get the opportunity. I live and it accords me the benefit of rambling like an old fool to wide-eyed younger people who in some distant future would be fortunate enough to recount their pearls of wisdom. I hope that some of these gems may have been dispensed by me. I am proud of being called old as I remember the words of Frank Lloyd Wright, "The longer I live, the more beautiful life becomes." But let us not forget that getting old also comes with a lot of responsibility towards others. I hope that I can say with hands on my heart when I meet the supreme being, "I lived a life that made a difference to the people around me!"

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA

# BJP retains control, INDIA gains ground



SIDHARTH MISHRA

The Opposition's revival from near-disarray presents a formidable challenge but may fall short of the impact needed to dislodge the BJP-led NDA

With phase four of the polling over, we are more than halfway through the ongoing Lok Sabha polls. There is no denying that the opposition INDIA bloc, led by the Congress, has been able to create a perspective that it isn't a one-sided battle and the fight was on all the seats. The usual gimmicks of stock market predictions and illegal 'satta' gambling forecasts have started to emerge on social media and private WhatsApp groups. However the underlying message is that come what may, the BJP shall be able to form the Government. This probably emerges from the faith the BJP supporters have in the abilities of Prime Minister Narendra Modi being a leader with gargantuan mass appeal. However, there is also no denying the fact that the opposition was in tatters when the poll campaign started but by the passing of time have been able to create an image of a close fight, which in the end could prove to be just a mirage. Nevertheless, the Congress campaign in the 2024 polls, whatever the results, would remain an area of discussion among the political scientists in the times to come.

Congress's poll preparation could be said to have begun from the conclave it had at Udaipur in 2022. The declarations at the 'Udaipur Shivir' talked of building a vibrant organisation. This came in the backdrop of desertions plaguing the party especially from their most prominent leader Rahul Gandhi's coterie. In 2022, when the Congress met in Rajasthan, one right decision it took was to hold the polls for the post of the president of the All India Congress Committee. It did activate the party and in Mallik arjun Kharge, the party has found a good campaigner, who not only campaigns hard but makes a lot of sense with what he says. Strategically, unlike the Vidhan Sabha polls held some months back in the four States, the leadership has consolidated on the



alliance despite the initial hiccup caused by its very convener, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar walking out of the formation. Though some point out that Kharge and not Nitish was foisted as the chair of the alliance, as given his track record, Nitish's opposition to the BJP was always suspect. The second move by Congress has been to channel the strength of the alliance partners to keep itself afloat. To this end, the party went into the 2019 polls all by itself. With no major allies and up against the BJP and the SP-BSP alliance, Congress contested 67 of the State's 80 seats. It could win only one: Sonia Gandhi in Rae Bareilly. This time in alliance with the Samajwadi Party it's contesting just 17 seats, down by 50 seats. People close to poll planning, point out that it has been done to conserve the party resources for more realistic contests. Similarly West Bengal, after contesting 40 seats in 2019 is contesting just 14 seats this time giving the remaining seats to the alliance partner - the Left parties. Similar arrange-



THE CONGRESS CAMPAIGN IN THE 2024 POLLS, WHATEVER THE RESULTS, WOULD REMAIN AN AREA OF DISCUSSION AMONG POLITICAL SCIENTISTS IN THE TIMES TO COME

ments have been made in other States. Now how would that affect the final results? The BJP in 2024 wants to equal the performance of the Congress in 1984 when it got more than 400 seats. What's not to be forgotten is that those 400 seats came as a harvest of the sympathy wave in the favour of the party following the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. What makes BJP in 2024 different from Congress in 1984 is that it has delivered on its ideological agenda thus the cadre commitment would be there. Based on that the saffron party has expanded its poll machinery. This could work both ways, if there is an undercurrent, it would bring bonus points and if there is voter indifference, the performance should not fall below, as they say in commerce, the reserve price.

(The writer is the author and president, the Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice; views expressed are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### THE ESSENCE OF RAM RAJYA

Madam — Apropos the news article "Ram Rajya will begin in the country now, doesn't mean theocratic State: Rajnath Singh," published on 14 May, this is my response. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's remarks on the inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and the concept of Ram Rajya reflect a perspective blending faith with civic duty. Singh emphasises that Ram Rajya isn't about establishing a theocratic State but fostering a sense of responsibility among citizens. His call for a return to the essence of politics, where words align with actions, resonates with the public disillusionment with political rhetoric. Singh's stance on the triple talaq issue underscores a commitment to gender equality transcending religious boundaries. His assertion reflects a broader narrative of social justice and protection of vulnerable individuals, regardless of religious affiliation. As he seeks reelection, Singh's emphasis on fulfilling electoral promises underscores accountability in governance. His track record in Lucknow adds weight to his assertion, aligning action with words. Overall, Singh's discourse encapsulates a nuanced understanding of governance, intertwining religious symbolism with practical governance and societal welfare.

Vihaan Sharma | Kolkata

#### KEJRIWAL'S GUARANTEE

Madam — It refers to the article "Kejriwal's bail: Unveiling political prophanis post-release," published on 13 May. Most of the AAP's guarantees require more funds since most are a burden to the State exchequer. Free electricity, the MSP guarantee, the scrapping of the magnifier and the creation of two crore jobs need heavy payout from the State exchequer. Finding funds without taxing the people is not possible in today's situation. The six guarantees of the Congress remain to be implemented in Karnataka and Telangana. Guarantees have become political stunts during elections. Furthermore, during the last 2019 gener-

#### Triangular contest in Ladakh



Apropos the news article "Ladakh stands alone in Lok Sabha roll call," published on 13 May, this is my response. The political landscape in Ladakh has dramatically shifted, morphing a once two-way battle between the BJP and Congress into a three-way challenge. The emergence of local alliances and the entry of an independent candidate complicates the electoral dynamics, adding layers to an already complex scenario. The contest reflects the region's aspi-

rations and frustrations, particularly regarding Statehood and constitutional status. The BJP's incumbency faces scrutiny, with discontent palpable over unmet demands. Meanwhile, Congress positions itself as a champion of local interests, leveraging historic ties and promising to address grievances. The involvement of grassroots movements and renowned figures underscores the grassroots activism shaping Ladakh's political narrative. The electorate's choice will influence not just parliamentary representation but also the trajectory of regional autonomy and development. As the campaigns intensify, candidates grapple with reconciling national agendas with local exigencies, emphasising dialogue and resolution of longstanding issues. Ultimately, Ladakh stands at a crossroads, poised to redefine its political identity through this pivotal electoral battle.

Dhruv Malhotra | Mumbai

al election, Kejriwal said that that would be the last election if Modi is returned to power. It was Indira Gandhi who included the words socialism and secularism in the preamble of the Constitution. So the charge Modi will not hold elections or tamper with the constitution is without substance and a repeat of what was said in 2019. Furthermore, many politicians, actors and so-called social workers said in 2014 and 2019 that if Modi wins the elections they will move out of the country. Still, they are all here enjoying the fruits of freedom. On corruption, first, let Kejriwal come clean on the Delhi liquor gate scam.

N R Ramchandran | Chennai

#### PARAG'S INSPIRING JOURNEY

Madam — Apropos the news article "Home Turf: Rajasthan Aim to clinch a playoff berth in Parag's 'Royal' Homecoming," published on 14 May, this is my response. Riyan Parag's journey from the northeastern corner of India to becoming a cricketing sensation embodies hope and perseverance. His anticipated return to Guwahati, backed by a

robust performance, not only fuels the Rajasthan Royals' playoff dreams but also marks a milestone for cricket in the region. Parag's stellar season, coupled with the strategic investment made by the Royals, highlights the potential lying dormant in lesser-explored cricketering territories.

The upcoming matches against Punjab Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders hold more than just playoff implications; they symbolise the rise of a new cricketering stronghold. While Parag's emergence steals the spotlight, it's crucial to acknowledge the collective effort of the team. Sanju Samson's leadership and consistent batting form, alongside the solid bowling unit, underscore the Royals' strength as a cohesive unit. As cricket enthusiasts, witnessing Parag's ascent not only inspires but also reshapes the narrative of cricketering talent in India, extending its reach beyond conventional boundaries.

Ishita Kapoor | Ahmedabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



## FIRST COLUMN

## HARNESSING THE POWER OF RESOLUTION

Achievers propel success with determination and humility



RAVI VALLURI

Successful completion of a task releases endorphins in the body which act as a tonic and an analgesic. "Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other," said Abraham Lincoln. Resolution is the positive intent, resolve or aspiration to give a hundred per cent to achieve the targeted goal. Before treading the path, one should remain grateful and blessed for the abundance provided by nature. Half the job gets done by feeling the blessings.

Effort, skill and courage are prerequisites for brewing this heady cocktail. Achievers tap the potential from the depths of their minds and hearts and conquer the fear of failure in the process.

The mind is that element of a person that enables him to be aware of the world and its myriad experiences to think positively and to feel the faculty of consciousness simultaneously purging negative thoughts in the bargain. One must dream big, even if ideas may appear outlandish to become high-end achievers and ensure to never kill an idea, however whimsical it may appear on the surface. That is the Audacity of Hope. Be it a Mandela, a Modi, or an Obama.

"The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires," writes William Arthur Ward. Successful individuals foster friendships and build trust. There is no deficit in trust. They respect colleagues and only symphony is orchestrated in the environment. There is no room for any cacophony.

Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar always differentiates between mere hearing and the art of listening. Listening is a trait of a humble person; while hearing is the character of a brusque and an inaccessible person. An achiever is available to all his followers 24\*7, 365 days a year. Achievers are adaptable to new ideas, thought processes, abstractions and intentions. Their minds are not closeted by achievements or failures of the past and continuously live in the present moment. This is the trademark of their personality.



Those who are high achievers are not driven by amassing wealth. Such trailblazers and trendsetters are continuous learners. Leadership implies 360 degrees for them. These are learned, learn some more and learn even more. Top-grade sportsmen, artists and scientists are compulsive learners and are humble about their achievements. There is only one path from the top and that is downhill. High-end achievers never believe that they have reached the summit or the pinnacle or that they are too powerful.

Such a conjecture smacks of capriciousness and arrogance and that would be their nemesis. Every successful career is a lesson in humility. Rewards and recognition are meant to act as motivators, not create a glass ceiling of conceit.

Achievers are surrounded by positive-oriented people and positive thoughts, as negative emotions are a big drain on resources. It is important to ascertain positive feedback and build on the synergy of the group. Understanding group dynamics is an important physical and psychological tool. They glean synergies of any joint venture. Achievers always work with teams and individuals who share their values, they possess long-term vision inherently and believe in themselves and the set goals. They direct the wind and the sails. Such people need to build on their strengths and those of the organisation. It is essential and paramount to prioritise targets, the mission and vision Statements, identify a self-do list and focus on projects that can be delegated.

"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way," says John C Maxwell.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

## Electric tractors for electrifying agriculture



AS MITTAL

These technological marvels promise not only to rejig farming practices but also to mitigate the industry's environmental footprint

Climate change is an issue of utmost importance that the world is currently facing and it is a challenge that is complex and multifaceted. Particularly the agriculture sector is vulnerable, as greenhouse gas emissions are being released into the atmosphere, causing extreme weather conditions such as heat waves and floods. This is directly impacting crop productivity and farmers' livelihoods, which is a significant threat to global food security.

To counter this challenge, we must adopt environmentally friendly cultivation and processing methods. Electric tractors are one of the globally emerging excellent alternatives for future farming. It can reduce farming costs and zero emissions effectively addressing the issue of a sustainable environment and reducing our dependence on imports of crude oil.

As the world's largest tractor manufacturer, India sells over 1 million tractors annually. However, the adoption of electric tractors has been slower than other electric vehicles (EVs) like two-wheelers, three-wheelers, passenger cars and electric buses. It's time to take action and promote electric tractors. This will foster an environment for mass adoption and position India as a global exporter of electric tractors. To achieve this, we must integrate electric tractors into incentivised EV policies. It's unacceptable that no incentives are being offered for electrifying tractors.

Electric Tractors Could be Fetched in FAME-3 Scheme: The FAME-2 scheme (April 2019-March 2024) was a central Government subsidy that aims to promote the Fast Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles (FAME). The scheme ended on 31st March, with a total outlay of Rs 10,000 crore to support the production of 7,000 electric buses, half a million electric three-wheelers, 55,000 electric passenger cars and one million electric two-wheelers. However, the scheme excludes electric tractors, which means that manufacturers cannot significantly reduce the cost of producing electric tractors.

The Ministry of Heavy Industries has recently proposed the FAME-3 scheme, which has an outlay of Rs 12,600. The scheme is expected to be implemented after the Lok Sabha elections. Farmers are hoping that the scheme will include electric tractors, which will reduce their costs significantly. With a subsidy of up to Rs 2.4 lakh (capped at 40 per cent of the tractor's base price), the burden of high purchasing costs on farmers will be greatly reduced.

To promote the use of electric vehicles, several States such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh offer concessions or a waiver on the road tax between 50 per cent and 100 per cent. Other States, including Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, offer direct cash incentives on top of the road tax waiver through a similar approach to the central FAME scheme. The incentives range from Rs 2,500 to Rs 10,000 and the subsidy cap ranges from Rs 60,000 to Rs 2.5 lakh, depending on the battery capacity. Punjab and Haryana offer incentives (up to 40 per cent of the ex-showroom price) for e-tractors in their EV policies. Other key agricultural States should consider following this approach to promote sustainable agricultural practices.

Rationalisation of Taxes: Tax rationalisation has proven to be an effective way of promoting electric vehicles through discounted taxes and insurance fees. The existing fiscal incentives provided for zero-emission



THE ADOPTION OF ELECTRIC TRACTORS PRESENTS A STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIA TO ENHANCE ITS ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY, PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN ACHIEVING NET-ZERO EMISSIONS, STRENGTHEN THE RURAL ECONOMY AND SHAPE A SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT FARM FUTURE

motor vehicles should be extended to zero-emission tractors as well. While electric vehicles are charged a reduced GST of 5 per cent, e-tractors are still taxed at the same rate as diesel tractors, which is 12 per cent. Additionally, electric vehicles receive a 15 per cent discount on third-party insurance premiums, whereas this provision is not available for e-tractors. The International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) has analysed that reducing the GST to 5 per cent or even nil and providing discounted insurance would reduce the cost gap between electric and diesel tractors by almost 40 per cent.

Infrastructure Development: Investing in charging infrastructure for electric tractors, especially in rural areas, is crucial for the rural economy to meet India's development goals by 2047. Using corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds for this purpose and establishing a charging station network with incentives will ensure widespread accessibility and convenience for farmers.

To increase demand for electric tractors, it's important to introduce them into custom hiring centres for agricultural machinery. This will help farmers experience the benefits of electric tractors and mitigate challenges related to charging and maintenance.

R&D Investments & Training: Allocating funds for research and development in electric tractor technology can lead to innovation, efficiency improvement and cost reduction. Encouraging collaboration between Government agencies, agricultural research institutions such as the Indian Council for Agricultural Research and the manufacturers would speed up technological advancements in the sector. Developing and certifying testing and quality assurance standards for electric tractors can attract manufacturers to this sector, addressing supply-side constraints. Institutes

like the Central Farm Machinery Training & Testing Institute can set manufacturing, operational and performance standards for various electric tractors based on power output, design and usage purposes. Training and skill development initiatives for farmers, technicians and service providers on electric tractor operation, maintenance and repair are crucial. Empowering stakeholders with the necessary knowledge and skills will facilitate the transition to electric tractors and ensure their effective use in agricultural operations.

Zero Emissions in Electric Tractor: A study by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, reveals that the agriculture sector in India is responsible for almost 14 per cent of the country's greenhouse gas emissions, with diesel-powered machinery playing a major role. However, electric tractors could be a solution to these challenges.

Currently, most tractors used in India are powered by diesel, which accounts for approximately 7.4 per cent of the country's annual diesel consumption, equivalent to the amount consumed by buses. While incentives have been introduced to encourage the electrification of buses, no such incentives have been introduced for tractors.

The adoption of electric tractors presents some challenges, such as the initial cost, infrastructure development and promoting their use among farmers. Diesel-powered machinery, notably tractors, accounts for approximately 12-15 per cent of the total cost of agricultural production, which varies by crop type and geographical region. However, electric tractors have many advantages, including zero-emission and a reduction in fuel and maintenance costs due to having fewer moving parts.

According to a study by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), electric tractors could reduce

maintenance costs by up to 40 per cent over their lifetime, providing a more reliable, environment friendly and cost-effective option for farmers. The Way Forward: India's tractor manufacturers have developed advanced technology and moved beyond incentives to introduce electric tractors. However, the primary challenge at present is the cost. On-road zero-emission electric tractors cost 40 to 50 per cent more than diesel tractors. This high cost could deter farmers, even though electric tractors are more cost-effective when used in the field. Urgent support from the Government is needed in the early stages of the market to bridge the cost gap between e-tractors and diesel-driven tractors.

Central and State-level incentives would send a positive signal to the industry to invest more in zero-emission tractors. Additionally, this aligns with India's goal of improving air quality and energy security and has the potential to boost India's tractor exports. Countries such as the US, Europe, Japan and Canada have implemented strict regulations for tractor emissions and have expressed interest in decarbonising farm machinery.

The global electric tractor market is projected to grow from USD 0.7 billion in 2024 to USD 3.4 billion by 2030, presenting a strategic opportunity for India to leverage its manufacturing capabilities. It can enhance its economic competitiveness, play a pivotal role in achieving net-zero emissions, strengthen the rural economy and shape a sustainable and resilient farm future.

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## AI is revolutionising sustainable, tech-driven farming

By harnessing data-driven insights, AI empowers farmers to optimise resource allocation, mitigate environmental degradation and enhance crop yields

Artificial intelligence (AI) in agriculture is expected to increase dramatically food waste, climate change and other issues lead approximately one billion people to remain hungry and malnourished even though the globe produces enough food to feed everyone. With 9.7 billion people expected to inhabit the planet by 2050, the agriculture sector is under increasing pressure to provide food with less resource use and less environmental effect. Thankfully, the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in agriculture has promise for revolutionising food systems and mitigating the world food issue. AI can assist farmers in making data-driven choices, optimising resource consumption and minimising envi-



PRERNA NEGI

ronmental effects by analysing data from several sources. According to a World Economic Forum analysis, integrating AI into agriculture might result in a 60 per cent reduction in the use of pesticides and a 50 per cent reduction in water usage. Market demand analysis is an essential component of contemporary agriculture. In addition to analysing meteorological data and satellite

photos, AI can assist farmers in choosing the best crop to produce or sell and offer insightful advice on when to plant and what kind of crop to grow. It is possible to forecast market demand for certain crops while optimising profitability by examining data patterns. Farmers may reduce the likelihood of crop failures by using forecasting and predictive analytics. This will create software applications that analyse fruits and vegetables and offer information on their quality, freshness and size using artificial intelligence (AI) and computer vision methods. In addition to identifying flaws and illnesses in crops, these AI technologies allow farmers to take preventative action before the crops are impacted. Artificial

Intelligence (AI) can assist in the production of crops that are more weather and disease-adapted by gathering data on plant growth. Scientists can use AI to find the best-performing plant kinds and cross-breed them to make even more superior hybrids. AI systems are capable of reliably estimating missing nutrients and performing chemical soil analysis.

One of their products, Nutrient Scanner, gathers information from soil samples and gives farmers precise estimations of the nutrients that are lacking and the general condition of the soil. This enables farmers to optimise crop growth and minimise environmental impact by modifying irrigation schedules and fertiliser applications. AI

can monitor the State of plants to spot and predict diseases, identify and remove weeds and recommend effective treatment of pests.

It can also suggest the most effective treatment for pests, reducing the need for broad-spectrum insecticides that can harm beneficial insects and lead to pesticide resistance. Farmers find it difficult and time-consuming to estimate crop growth and maturity, but AI can complete the work accurately and swiftly. Farmers can accurately forecast when crops will achieve ideal maturity by monitoring and tracking crop changes with the use of AI-powered gear, such as sensors and image recognition tools. According to studies, the accuracy rate attained by employing AI to forecast crop

maturity was greater than that of human observers. Farmers may benefit from large cost savings and better revenues as a result of this improved precision. Farmers can precisely track the amount of water and nutrients in the soil by integrating sensors and AI systems.

Deploying devices that detect several factors such as temperature, pH levels, nutrient content and soil moisture might be part of the sensor-based soil monitoring process. These sensors relay data back to AI systems, which process it, evaluate it and advise farmers on the best ways to handle their crops in light of the soil conditions they have discovered. AI-powered technologies can help farmers identify plant illnesses and insects faster

than people can. For instance, an AI-powered system might identify an aphid infestation on a strawberry field, transmit the information back to the farmer's Smartphone and then recommend the best course of action.

Through a linked sprayer, the device could even automate the spraying of pesticides if necessary. AI technology can be used to automate insect or weed control. Robotic weeding is supposed to be extraordinarily accurate with the use of computer vision, saving 90 per cent of pesticide use. These solutions use data analytics to determine how much pesticide is required for each field based on information about crop type, soil condition and field history. In the upcoming years, artificial

intelligence (AI) in agriculture is expected to increase dramatically since it can completely transform the industry by boosting efficiency, decreasing waste and raising crop yields. The market for AI in agriculture is likely to develop rapidly, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 35.6 per cent expected to see the market size rise from \$2.35 billion in 2020 to \$10.83 billion by 2025, according to research by Markets and Markets. This will lead to more informed decision-making and improved crop yields, essential for addressing the global food security challenge.

(The writer is research Scholar, Department of Agronomy, SGRR University, Dehradun; views are personal)

# Biden admin sending \$1 bn more in weapons, ammo to Israel

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration has told key lawmakers it would send more than USD 1 billion in additional arms and ammunition to Israel, three congressional aides have said. But it was not immediately known how soon the weapons would be delivered.

It's the first arms shipment to Israel to be revealed since the administration put another arms transfer, consisting of 3,000 bombs of up to 2,000 pounds each, on hold this month.

The Biden administration, citing concern for civilian casualties in Gaza, has said it paused that bomb transfer to keep Israel from using those particular munitions in its offensive in the crowded southern Gaza city of Rafah.

The package disclosed Tuesday includes about USD 700 million



for tank ammunition, USD 500 million in tactical vehicles, and USD 60 million in mortar rounds, the congressional aides said. They spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an arms transfer that has not yet been made public. There was no immediate indication of when the arms would be sent. Two congressional aides said the shipment is not part of the long-delayed foreign aid package that Congress passed and

Biden signed last month. It wasn't known if the shipment was the latest tranche from an existing arms sale or something new. The Biden administration has come under criticism from both sides of the political spectrum over its military support for Israel's now seven-month-old war against Hamas in Gaza — at a time when Biden is battling for reelection against former President Donald Trump. Some of Biden's fellow Democrats have pushed him to limit transfers of offensive weapons to Israel to pressure the US ally to do more to protect Palestinian civilians. Protests on college campuses around the US have driven home the message this spring. Republican lawmakers have seized on the administration's pause on the bomb transfers, saying any lessening of US support for Israel — its closest ally in the Middle East — weakens that country as it fights Hamas and other Iran-backed groups. In the House, they are planning to advance a bill this week to mandate the delivery of offensive weaponry for Israel.

Despite the one-time suspension of a bomb shipment, Biden and administration officials have made clear they will continue other weapons deliveries and overall military support to Israel, which is the largest recipient of US military aid. Biden will see to it that "Israel has all of the military means it needs to defend itself against all of its enemies, including Hamas," national security spokesman John Kirby told reporters Monday.

"For him, this is very straightforward: He's going to continue to provide Israel with all of the capabilities it needs, but he does not want certain categories of American weapons used in a particular type of operation in a particular place.

# Slovakia's prime minister wounded in shooting

AP ■ BRATISLAVA

Slovakia's populist Prime Minister Robert Fico was wounded in a shooting Wednesday afternoon and taken to hospital.

Reports on TA3, a Slovakian TV station, said that Fico, 59, was hit in the stomach after four shots were fired outside the House of Culture in the town of Handlova, some 150 kilometers northeast of the capital, where the leader was meeting with supporters. A suspect has been detained, it said.

Police sealed off the scene, and Fico was taken to a hospital in Banska Bystrica. The shooting in Slovakia comes three weeks ahead of crucial European Parliament elections, in which populist and hard-right parties in the 27-nation bloc appear poised to make gains. Deputy speaker of parliament Lubos Blaha confirmed the incident during a session of



Slovakia's Parliament and adjourned it until further notice, the Slovak TASR news agency said.

Slovakia's major opposition parties, Progressive Slovakia and Freedom and Solidarity, canceled a planned protest against a controversial government plan to overhaul public broadcasting that they say would give the government full control of public radio and television.

"We absolutely and strongly condemn violence and today's shooting of Premier Robert Fico," said Progressive Slovakia

leader Michal Simecka. "At the same time we call on all politicians to refrain from any expressions and steps which could contribute to further increasing the tension."

President Zuzana Caputova condemned "a brutal and ruthless" attack on the premier. "I'm shocked," Caputova said. "I wish Robert Fico a lot of strength in this critical moment and a quick recovery from this attack."

Fico, a third-time premier, and his leftist Smer, or Direction, party, won Slovakia's Sept. 30 parliamentary elections, staging a political comeback after campaigning on a pro-Russian and anti-American message.

Critics worried Slovakia under Fico would abandon the country's pro-Western course and follow the direction of Hungary under populist Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

Thousands have repeatedly rallied in the capital and across Slovakia to protest Fico's policies.

# German court convicts Palestinian of train murder

Berlin (AP): A court in Germany convicted a man of murder and sentenced him to life in prison Wednesday for carrying out a fatal stabbing on a train last year.

The state court in Itzehoe convicted the 34-year-old Palestinian, who has been identified only as Ibrahim A. in line with German privacy rules, of murder and attempted murder, German news agency dpa reported. It found that he fatally stabbed two teenagers and wounded another four passengers seriously in the January 25, 2023 incident in the northern town of Brokstedt, before being overpowered by others on board the regional train travelling from Kiel to Hamburg.

The defendant grew up in the Gaza Strip and came to Germany in 2014.

# Dutch anti-Islam party nears government formation

Brussels (AP): Anti-Islam firebrand Geert Wilders is on the verge of brokering a four-party coalition in the Netherlands six months after coming in first in national elections, opening the prospect that yet another European Union nation will veer toward the hard right weeks ahead of EU-wide elections.

Wilders has said he does not expect to become prime minister himself, because he remains too extreme for his coalition partners, but his Party for Freedom would be the driving force in the coalition.

With hard right and populist parties now part of or leading a half dozen governments in the 27-nation bloc, they appear positioned to make gains in the June 6-9 EU polls.

"I hope we will get there. I think we will get there. I cannot see it going wrong," Wilders told the broadcaster NOS early Wednesday after the four parties reached a deal on government financing, the last major stumbling bloc in the talks. It remains unclear who will become prime minister.

"That is still crucial. If you want a government to succeed, you need a prime minister that unites," said Pieter Omtzigt, leader of the centrist New Social Contract party. Outgoing prime minister Mark Rutte's center-right People's Party for Freedom and Democracy and the populist Farmer Citizen Movement are also in the coalition talks.

Wilders said Wednesday could become "a historic day" if his party is finally let into a government. It once supported a minority government a decade ago, but was not part of it. Wilders' Party for Freedom won 37 seats in the 150-seat lower house of the Dutch parliament, and the four parties combined hold a comfortable majority of 88 seats.

After two decades in the opposition, Wilders seemed to have a shot at leading a nation that long prided itself on its tolerant society, but he has stepped aside in the interests of pushing through most of his agenda.

From Finland to Croatia, hard-line right parties are part of European governing coalitions, and hard right or populist prime ministers are leading Hungary, Slovakia and Italy.

# Palestinians across Middle East mark 'catastrophe' with eyes on Gaza war

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Palestinians across the Middle East on Wednesday are marking the anniversary of their mass expulsion from what is now Israel with protests and other events across the region at a time of mounting concern over the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

The Nakba, Arabic for "catastrophe," refers to the 700,000 Palestinians who fled or were driven out of what today is Israel before and during the war surrounding its creation in 1948. More than twice that number have been displaced within Gaza since the start of the latest war, which was triggered by Hamas' October 7 attack into Israel.

UN agencies say 550,000 people, nearly a quarter of Gaza's 2.3 million people, have been newly displaced in just the last week, as Israeli forces have pushed into the southern city of Rafah, along the border with Egypt, and reinvaded parts of northern Gaza. "We lived through the Nakba not just once, but several

times," said Umm Shadi Sheikh Khalil, who was displaced from Gaza City and now lives in a tent in the central Gaza town of Deir al-Balah. The refugees and their descendants number some 6 million and live in built-up refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the Israeli-occupied West Bank. In Gaza, they are the majority of the population, with most families having relocated from what is now central and southern Israel.

Israel rejects what the Palestinians say is their right of return, because if it was fully implemented, it would likely result in a Palestinian majority within Israel's borders.

The refugee camps in Gaza have seen some of the heaviest fighting of the war. In other camps across the region, the fighting has revived painful memories from earlier rounds of violence in a decades-old conflict with no end in sight.

At a centre for elderly residents of the Shatila refugee camp in Beirut, Amina Taher recalled the day her family's house in the

village of Deir al-Qassi, in today's northern Israel, collapsed over their heads after being shelled by Israeli forces in 1948.

The house was next to a school that was being used as a base by Palestinian fighters, she said. Taher, then 3 years old, was pulled from the rubble unharmed, but her 1-year-old sister was killed. Now she has seen the same scenes play out in news coverage of Gaza. "When I would watch the news, I had a mental breakdown because then I remembered when the house fell on me," she said. "What harm did these children do to get killed like this?" Daoud Nasser, also now living in Shatila, was 6 years old when his family fled from the village of Balad al-Sheikh, near Haifa. His father tried to return to their village in the early years after 1948, when the border was relatively porous, but found a Jewish family living in their house, he said. Nasser said he would attempt the same journey if the border were not so heavily guarded. "I would run. I'm

ready to walk from here to there and sleep under the olive trees on my own land," he said.

The latest war began with Hamas' rampage across southern Israel, through some of the same areas where Palestinians fled from their villages 75 years earlier. Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people that day, mostly civilians, and took another 250 hostage.

Israel responded with one of the heaviest military onslaughts in recent history, obliterating entire neighbourhoods in Gaza and forcing some 80 per cent of the population to flee their homes. Gaza's Health Ministry says over 35,000 Palestinians have been killed, without distinguishing between civilians and combatants in its count. The UN says there is widespread hunger and that northern Gaza is in a "full-blown famine."

Israel says its goal is to dismantle Hamas and return the estimated 100 hostages, and the remains of more than 30 others, still held by the group after it released most of the rest during a cease-fire last year.

# Houthi Rebels admit attacking US destroyer in Red sea

AP ■ DUBAI

Yemen's Houthi rebels on Wednesday claimed targeting a U.S. Navy destroyer and a commercial ship in the Red Sea. However, the attack on the warship apparently happened nearly two days earlier and saw the vessel intercept the missile targeting it.

The latest statement from the Houthis comes as their attacks on shipping, which have disrupted trade through a vital corridor leading onto the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Sea, have slowed in recent weeks. Though the rebels have not acknowledged the slowdown, the U.S. military has suggested its airstrikes and interceptions of Houthi fire have disrupted their assaults and chewed into their weapon stockpiles.

Recently, the Houthis have been claiming days-old attacks. Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree said the rebels targeted the USS Mason with missiles and launched an attack on a ship he identified as the Destiny. Multiple vessels have that name in shipping reg-



istries.

The Mason, an Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer, has been in the Red Sea and the wider region as part of a U.S.-led coalition trying to prevent Houthi attacks on shipping. On Monday night, the Mason successfully engaged and destroyed one inbound anti-ship ballistic missile launched by (the) Iranian-backed Houthis from Yemen over the Red Sea, the U.S. military's Central Command said.

The US Navy's Mideast-based 5th Fleet did not immediately respond to a request for comment regarding the claimed attack on the Destiny.

The Houthis say their attacks

on shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden are aimed at pressuring Israel to end its war against Hamas in Gaza, which has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians there, according to local health officials. The war began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 others hostage.

The Houthis have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, seized one vessel and sunk another since November, according to the U.S. Maritime Administration. Shipping through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden has declined because of the threat.

# Protesters throng streets of Georgia's capital

AP ■ TBILISI

Huge throngs of protesters blocked streets in the capital of Georgia and milled angrily outside the parliament building after lawmakers on Tuesday approved a "foreign influence" bill that critics call a Russian-style threat to free speech and the country's aspirations to join the European Union.

Soon after the 84-30 vote, a crowd of protesters in front of parliament tried to break metal barriers near the building. At least 13 people were arrested and Georgian news reports showed one with severe cuts and bruises on his head.

The protests expanded after nightfall, with thousands of demonstrators marching to Heroes Square about two kilometers from the parliament and blocking off the streets that converge on the square. The bill requires media and nongovernmental organisations and other nonprofit groups to

register as "pursuing the interests of a foreign power" if they receive more than 20 per cent of their funding from abroad. The government says the bill is needed to stem what it deems as harmful foreign actors trying to destabilize politics in the South Caucasus nation of 3.7 million people.

The opposition has denounced the bill as "the Russian law" because Moscow uses similar legislation to crack down on independent news media, nonprofits and activists critical of the Kremlin.

European Council President Charles Michel said Tuesday that if Georgians "want to join the EU, they have to respect the fundamental principles of the rule of law and the democratic principles."



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# French President mulls state of emergency in New Caledonia

AP ■ PARIS

French President Emmanuel Macron is considering imposing state of emergency in the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia to curb spiraling violence, the presidency said Wednesday. At least three people were killed and four others, including a gendarme, were seriously injured, according to officials in the territory and French media reports on Wednesday. More than 130 people have been arrested and more than 300 have been injured since Monday, when protesters over a constitutional voting reform pushed by Paris turned violent in the archipelago, which has long sought independence.

Speaking at parliament, Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, who attended a two-hour meeting with top ministers at the Elysee, said the aim of the state of emergency would be "to restore order in the short-

est time possible."

A decree on the methods to impose the state of emergency is to be presented to the French Cabinet on Wednesday afternoon.

In a statement, Macron emphasized the need for a resumption of political dialogue and asked the prime minister and the minister of the interior and overseas territories to invite New Caledonian delegations to Paris.

"All violence is intolerable and will be the subject of a relentless response to ensure the return of order," the statement said.

There have been decades of tensions on the archipelago between Indigenous Kanaks seeking independence and descendants of colonizers who want to remain part of France. French Minister of Interior and Overseas Territories Gerald Darmanin said that 100 gendarmes were evacuated

during violence overnight following "an attack on their station with an ax and live ammunition."

"Calm must absolutely be restored," Darmanin said in an interview with French broadcaster RTL.

On Tuesday, the French Interior Ministry sent police reinforcements to New Caledonia, which long served as a prison colony and now hosts a French military base. About 1,000 gendarmes and 700 police officers have been deployed and a dozen professionals from a specialized police intervention and riot control unit have also been mobilized, the territory's top French official, High Commissioner Louis Le Franc, said at a news conference in New Caledonia.

The territory's political parties appealed for "calm and reason" with people who support independence and those who want the island to remain

part of France. "We have to continue to live together," the rival parties said in a joint statement on Wednesday. "Only with dialogue and resilience (we will) get through this situation."

Three people were killed and four were seriously injured in the unrest overnight and on Wednesday, French officials said. A fourth person, a member of the gendarmes, was also seriously injured near the southern town of Plum, according to France Info. He was evacuated in critical condition to the medical unit of the Pacific Marine Infantry Regiment, French broadcaster BFM reported.

Le Franc warned that if calm isn't restored, there will be "many deaths" in the area of the capital, Noumea, where protests over the voting rights turned violent on Tuesday. Local authorities extended a curfew until Thursday morning.

# Jurors in Trump's hush money trial are getting front row seat to history

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A gag order. The House Speaker turning up outside court. Angry denunciations of the judge overseeing the case. Some of the most explosive moments in Donald Trump's hush money trial have played out for most of the world to see — except for the people who are actually deciding his fate: the jury.

The 12-person panel is shown evidence and witness testimony so they can decide whether the former president is guilty of a scheme to buy up and bury seamy stories in an effort to illegally influence the 2016 presidential election. But it's a highly curated experience; jurors are not getting the full picture seen by those who follow along each day.

They don't even witness Trump enter or exit the courtroom. He's already there by the time they are brought into the room, and he stays until they are dismissed.

This is by design. Laws carefully govern how a criminal case is tried to ensure that a jury's decision on guilt or innocence isn't affected by fights over evidence or other legal sparring. It's routine to hold back a jury while trial lawyers argue with the judge about what can and can't be included for jurors to see during the trial. And attorneys often gather quietly at the judge's bench to talk about sensitive topics, out of their earshot.

Jurors, too, agree to a set of rules when they're chosen for a trial. They can't research the case. They must avoid all news about it. They also agree not to discuss



the case outside of court and not talk about it among themselves until deliberations, when all the evidence has been presented and they're deciding whether the defendant should be convicted. If they break any of these rules, they could be kicked off the panel and replaced with an alternate juror, or a mistrial could be declared.

So if they're taking their civic duty seriously, the Trump jury has never heard the Republican presidential candidate criticize Judge Juan M. Merchan as "totally conflicted." They don't know that Trump has been threatened with jail time and fined USD 10,000 for vio-

lating a gag order that bars him from talking about witnesses in the case, including the prosecution's star witness, Michael Cohen. They haven't watched Cohen's TikTok livestreams. They didn't see House Speaker Mike Johnson hold a press conference outside the courthouse this week, using his powerful position to show his party turning against the judicial system by declaring the Manhattan criminal trial illegitimate.

And they're unaware of the hours of legal wrangling over what witnesses can be called to testify, and what they can say when they're called.

Trump has pleaded not guilty to 34 counts of falsifying business records and denies any of the sexual encounters happened. Trump's attorneys, for example, last week asked the judge to

declare a mistrial over testimony to a crucial witness, Stormy Daniels, who spoke in discomfiting detail for jurors over the alleged sexual encounter with Trump that prompted the hush money payment just weeks before the presidential election in 2016. Jurors saw Daniels on the witness stand for 7.5 hours over two days.

The panel got sent home early the day Daniels finished testifying. And then Trump's attorneys argued with the judge the case should be thrown out over her testimony. They took issue with Daniels' testimony describing a power dynamic between her and Trump, and the visceral reaction she had when she says she saw Trump sitting on the bed of his hotel suite stripped down to his boxers and T-shirt.

"That is so prejudicial and so incredible for a jury to hear," Trump's attorney Todd Blanche argued. He blamed prosecutors for asking questions that elicited intimate details of the alleged encounter.

Judge Merchan refused to throw out the case.

Trump's attorneys also wanted to modify a gag order that bars him from talking about witnesses in the case. "He needs an opportunity to respond to the American people," Blanche argued.

Judge Merchan denied that request too. And an appeals court on Tuesday upheld the gag order; finding that Trump wasn't claiming the restrictions infringed on his right to a fair trial. He was arguing that being prohibited from talking about the case could adversely impact his 2024 presidential campaign.

But Trump's lawyers have won some, too. Merchan said no to prosecutors' request to play jurors a 1999 CNN interview in which Trump discussed his familiarity with campaign finance laws. And just before court let out last Friday, Merchan told prosecutors they should inform Cohen "that the judge is asking him to refrain from making any more statements" outside court about the case or about Trump.

More routine actions are also decided outside of the watchful eyes of the jury. The judge and attorneys talk about scheduling and days off - including this Friday, when the Republican presidential nominee will be attending his son Barron's high school graduation. And they've talked about potential upcoming witnesses.



# Wong sworn in as Singapore's new Prime Minister

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Economist Lawrence Wong was on Wednesday sworn in as Singapore's fourth prime minister in a planned political transition for the island state. Wong, 51, succeeded Lee Hsien Loong, 72, who relinquished his position after two decades; both belong to the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) that has been driving Singapore's economic progress for more than five decades. Wong, who was the deputy prime minister, will be leading the fourth generation PAP politicians' government as the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister.

President Tharman Shanmugaratnam, 67, administered the oath to Wong, described by the local media as a low-key leadership transition. Wong cited continuity, stability and the need to avoid disruptions as reasons for not making major changes at the minister (cabinet) level. "With all other ministers holding on to their portfolios across

the leadership transition from Lee Hsien Loong's government to Wong's, it also testifies to the consistency in Wong's decision-making," a Channel News Asia report said.

In April 2022, Wong was named as the leader of the PAP's fourth-generation, or 4G, team, and in June of that year promoted as the Deputy Prime Minister. Wong is married to Loo Tze Lui. Prior to entering politics, Wong was a civil servant for 14 years before joining the Ministry of Trade and Industry in 1997. The Wong-led government is expected to continue pro-business policies, given Singapore's status as an Asian financial hub generating investments for Asia, including India, and a trading centre with a global network.

Lee will stay on in the Cabinet as senior minister as has been the case with the first two Prime Ministers of the city state - Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong. Wong is retaining Heng Swee Keat, 63, and promoting



Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Lawrence Wong is sworn in as Singapore's fourth Prime Minister next to Singapore's President Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon at the Istana, in Singapore.

Minister for Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong, 65, as his two Deputy Prime Ministers.

President Tharman said he has full confidence in Wong's ability to lead as Singapore ventures into uncharted waters internationally, noting Wong's key role in shaping the country's economic and social policies, Channel News Asia said. "He will be his own person, with his own approach to building consensus and finding the best way forward for the country. And he will no doubt do so to his own rhythm and beat," Tharman said at the ceremony.

All eyes are now set on the next General Election, which must be held by November 2025, only after which significant changes to the Cabinet are expected. At a press conference earlier this week, Wong said: "Continuity and stability are key considerations (for the cabinet), especially as we are approaching the end of this term of government." "There is no higher priority for

me and that is to form the best possible team to serve Singapore and Singaporeans," he added.

Among Indian PAP parliamentarians, Murali Pillai, 56, has been promoted as minister of state in the Ministry of Law and the Ministry of Transport. Pillai, a lawyer, will be sworn in on July 1, 2024. The other Indian origin ministers in the cabinet - Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, 63, remains the Foreign Minister; K Shanmugam, 65, as Minister of Law and Home Affairs, and Indraneel Rajah, 61, as Minister in the Prime Minister's Office. Welcoming Wong as the new Prime Minister, the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI) said it is confident that Singapore-India ties will continue to flourish. "This is all the more so since Wong co-chaired the India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable, which has set the stage and the tone for long-term ties between our two countries," SICCI chairman Neil Parekh said.

## Pak conducts successful training launch of 'Fatah-II' rocket system

**Islamabad (PTI):** Pakistan on Wednesday conducted a successful training launch of guided multi-launch rocket system 'Fatah-II', which is capable of engaging targets with high precision up to a range of 400 kilometres, the army said. The launch of Fatah-II Guided Rocket System was aimed at perfecting the launch drills and procedures, the army said in a statement. "Equipped with state-of-the-art navigation system, unique trajectory and manoeuvrable features, Fatah-II is capable of engaging targets with high precision and defeating any missile defence system," it said. Moreover, the army also announced that "Fatah-II is being inducted in Pakistan's Artillery Divisions for stand-off, precision engagement of deep targets."

## Zelenskyy postpones foreign visits as Ukraine faces new Russian offensive

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy postponed all his upcoming foreign trips as Ukraine's army battled to contain a front-line push by the Kremlin's forces, as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday visited a drone manufacturing facility in Kyiv on the second day of a visit meant to reassure Ukrainians of continuing American support.

Zelenskyy cancelled all foreign visits "that were planned for the coming days," his office said Wednesday on Telegram. The head of state instructed his team to reschedule the visits. "We are grateful to our partners for understanding," the announcement said. Zelenskyy had been expected to visit Spain, and perhaps Portugal, later this week. No reason was given for his decision, but Ukraine is having a hard time fending off the latest Russian assault. Blinken also toured a grain transshipment facility and a bionics factory, praising Ukrainian innovation and ingenuity in the face of wartime difficulties.

"Ukraine has had to adapt and adjust to this and it's done so remarkably," Blinken said of grain exports now being taken by rail after traditional shipping routes were interrupted by Russia's full-scale invasion, which began on February 24, 2022. Russian troops are pressing a fresh offensive in northeast Ukraine's Kharkiv region. It began last week, marking the most significant border incur-



sion since the full-scale invasion began and forcing almost 8,000 local people to flee their homes.

Together with Moscow's week-long effort to build on its recent gains in the eastern Donetsk region, the more than two-year war has entered a critical stage for Ukraine's depleted army. Against that grim backdrop, with thousands of Ukrainian troops locked in fierce battles in towns and villages, Blinken on Tuesday pledged unceasing US support for the country, during and beyond the war. He also tried to lift spirits in Kyiv, performing on guitar with a band at a city bar and eating pizza at a veteran-run restaurant.

Russia is opening new fronts in order to stretch Ukraine's army, which is short of ammunition and manpower, along the about 1,000-kilometre front line, hoping defences

### Blinken announces USD 2 bn arms deal for Ukraine

**Kyiv (AP):** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has announced a USD 2 billion arms package deal for Ukraine — most of the money coming from a package approved last month. The announcement came Wednesday as Blinken was in Kyiv to reassure Ukraine of the US support as it attempts to fight off a new Russian offensive. At his final event Wednesday of a two-day visit to Kyiv, Blinken said the Biden administration had approved a USD 2 billion, medium- and long-term foreign military financing package for Ukraine.

The packages generally send US taxpayer money to American defense firms to manufacture and ship weaponry and other military supplies to the recipient country. The packages also include grain transshipment facility where Ukrainian grain is loaded into containers for export by rail. Blinken praised the ingenuity of the process, which local companies adopted after traditional shipping routes were interrupted by Russia's full-scale invasion, which began on February 24, 2022. "Ukraine has had to adapt and adjust to this and it's done so remarkably," Blinken said.

will crumble. Russian artillery and sabotage raids have also been menacing Ukraine's northern Chernihiv and Sumy regions, Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address Tuesday that the army has sent reinforcements to the Kharkiv and Donetsk regions. "It is too early to draw conclusions, but the situation is under control," he said. The pace of Russia's advance in the Kharkiv border region, where it launched an offensive late last week and has made significant progress, has slowed, the Institute for the Study of War said late Tuesday. The Washington-based think tank said Moscow's main aim there is to create a "buffer zone" that will prevent Ukrainian cross-border strikes on Russia's Belgorod region. Blinken on Wednesday visited a drone manufacturer on the outskirts of Kyiv and toured a

## Pak HC grants bail to Imran in corruption case

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A High Court in Pakistan on Wednesday granted bail to Imran Khan in the 190 million pounds corruption case, in which the jailed former prime minister and his wife are accused of receiving land worth billions of rupees as a bribe from a real estate tycoon.

A two-member bench of the Islamabad High Court comprising Chief Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, had reserved the verdict on Tuesday after the completion of arguments.

On Wednesday, the court asked Khan to submit a surety bond of Rs 1 million in order to secure bail. However, the order will not result in the ex-premier's release from Adiala jail since his sentences in the

Iddat and cypher cases are yet to be suspended.

Khan, who was arrested weeks ago in the case, had challenged his detention in the Islamabad High Court.

"Despite of being granted bail in the Al-Qadir case, Imran Khan will continue to remain imprisoned given that his bail or suspension of sentence in the Cipher and iddat cases are yet to happen," his party said in a statement.

His party added that it was safe to say by "looking at the bogus prosecution and tactics to procrastinate the bail petitions in other cases" that "courts are likely to bail Mr. Khan out soon".

Khan and his wife were indicted in the case by an accountability court in February. In December last year, the National Accountability

Bureau initiated an investigation against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Khan, his wife Bushra Bibi, and others in a case of alleged acquisition of hundreds of canals of land under the name of Al Qadir University Trust, resulting in a reported loss of 190 million pounds to the exchequer.

In his bail application in November last year, Khan alleged that the NAB, while acting as a tool of the previous Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government, used the case to harass him on political grounds.

The Al-Qadir Trust case is about the settlement of 190 million pounds, about Rs 50 billion, which the UK's National Crime Agency sent to Pakistan after recovering the amount from a Pakistani property tycoon.

Being the prime minister then, Khan, instead of depositing in the national treasury, allowed the businessman to use the amount to partly settle a fine of about Rs 450 billion imposed by the Supreme Court some years ago.

Reportedly, the tycoon, in return, gifted about 57 acres of land to a trust set up by Khan and Bushra Bibi to establish the Al-Qadir University in the Sohawa area of the Jhelum district of Punjab.

Khan has been lodged at the high-security Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi since August last year.

Since his removal from power in a no-confidence motion in April 2022, Khan has been convicted in at least four cases, including the cipher (secret diplomatic communication) case.

## Russia prepared to negotiate over Ukraine

AP ■ BEIJING

Russian President Vladimir Putin says his regime is prepared to negotiate over the conflict in Ukraine in an interview with Chinese media on the eve of visit to partner Beijing that has backed Moscow in its full-scale invasion of its neighbour.

"We are open to a dialogue on Ukraine, but such negotiations must take into account the interests of all countries involved in the conflict, including ours," Putin was quoted as saying by the official Xinhua News Agency on Wednesday. The Russian leader's two-day trip starting Thursday comes as his country's forces have pressed an offensive in north-

eastern Ukraine's Kharkiv region that began last week in the most significant border incursion since the full-scale invasion began, forcing almost 8,000 people to flee their homes.

Along with Moscow's efforts to build on its gains in the nearby Donetsk region, the 2-year-old war has entered a critical stage for Ukraine's depleted military that is awaiting new supplies of anti-aircraft missiles and artillery shells from the United States.

"We have never refused to negotiate," Putin was quoted as saying by Xinhua. "We are seeking a comprehensive, sustainable and just settlement of this conflict through peaceful means. We are open to a dia-

logue on Ukraine, but such negotiations must take into account the interests of all countries involved in the conflict, including ours."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said any negotiations must include a restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, the withdrawal of Russian troops, the release of all prisoners, a tribunal for those responsible for the aggression, and security guarantees for Ukraine. China claims to take a neutral position in the conflict, but has backed Moscow's contentions that Russia was provoked into attacking Ukraine by the West, despite Putin's public avowals of his desire to restore Russia's century-old borders as the rea-

son for his assault.

The Kremlin said in a statement that during their talks, Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping will "have a detailed discussion on the entire range of issues related to the comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation and determine the new directions for further development of cooperation between Russia and China and also have a detailed exchange of opinions on the most acute international and regional issues."

The visit furthers the effort by China and Russia to topple the US-led Western democratic order in favour of a more authoritarian model that crushes political opposition, human rights and freedom of speech.

## 'Radical Saudi Arabia scholar held for years should be tried or released'

**Dubai (AP):** A radical Sunni scholar whose criticisms of Saudi Arabia's government and the West drew praise from the late al-Qaida founder Osama bin Laden should be immediately tried or released from a yearslong arbitrary detention by the kingdom, independent experts working with the United Nations said Wednesday.

Safar bin Abdulrahman al-Hawali had been one of the prominent voices behind the Sahwa, or "Awakening" movement, in the kingdom, which called for strictly observing hardline Wahhabi beliefs and criticized his royal Saud family. Al-Hawali has been held without trial since 2018 as part of a wider crackdown on all dissent under King Salman and his assertive son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Al-Hawali, now in his mid-70s, was cited specifically by bin Laden in his 1996 declaration of war on the United States as one of the clerics detained by the kingdom purportedly on the order of the Americans.

The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities called for al-Hawali's release, saying ailments from strokes he suffered in 2005 and 2006 have made it difficult for him to speak or care for himself.

## Lanka's minority Tamil-dominated regions on alert

**Colombo (PTI):** Sri Lanka's security forces were placed on alert in the northern and eastern regions to counter attempts to commemorate LTTE members killed in the group's bitterly-fought conflict for a separate homeland for the minority Tamils, ahead of the anniversary of the long-drawn battles end. Security forces received information about events being organised throughout the island nation's Tamil-dominated North and East to commemorate the outlawed Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to mark the 15th anniversary of its final battle.

The three-decade-long armed, which started in 1983, was ended by the island nation's military by killing the leaders of the LTTE in 2009. Although the military decided against deploying troops, a special task force of the military and the police would keep a close eye on the possible LTTE commemorations from Wednesday to May 20. Security forces said that the distribution of pro-LTTE literature was seen at several commemorative events. At some events, calls were also made for the revival of the LTTE, which is under proscription internationally, including in India. Police have said that any group trying to commemorate the LTTE would be arrested.

However, Tamil political and rights groups say the events planned are to commemorate their kith and kin, who died in the long-drawn-out conflict since the mid-1970s. In Mullaitivu — the scene of the final battle — the main commemorative event is to take place at the beachfront in Vellamullivaikkal. In Tamil-dominated Jaffna, university and civil groups began the 'Mullivaikkal week' on May 11. Blood donation campaigns are being held in the memory of the fallen.

Porridge was distributed to mark the once-a-day serving civilians received when they were trapped in Mullaitivu when the final battles raged between the LTTE and the government troops. Police arrested four people, including three women, in the eastern town of Sampur for violating a court order banning the LTTE commemorations, it said on Tuesday. The LTTE ran a parallel administration in parts of the northern and eastern regions until May 2009. The armed conflict officially came to an end on May 19, 2003, when LTTE supreme Velupillai Prabhakaran's body was found in the lagoon of the northeastern region of Mullivaikkal. FGN13

## US to send an unofficial delegation as Taiwan's president is sworn in

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The White House will send an unofficial delegation to Taiwan this weekend for the inauguration of the island's democratically elected president, the Biden administration announced Wednesday, in a move that is certain to upset China but unlikely to draw excessive responses from Beijing as the two countries try to stabilise relations.

A senior White House official said the move is in line with longstanding US practice to send the delegation — which includes two former senior officials and a scholar — to the inauguration ceremony Monday. Lai Ching-te of the Democratic Progressive Party will take office, succeeding Tsai Ing-wen of the same party. Beijing, which sees Taiwan as part of Chinese territory and vows to seize the island by force if necessary to achieve unification, sees Lai as a supporter of Taiwan's independence and has long opposed any official contact between Washington and Taipei. "In what ways the US deals with the new Taiwan authorities on May 20 and afterwards will affect (the) cross-strait situation and also the China-US relations in the future," Liu Pengyu, spokesman for the Chinese Embassy in Washington, said Tuesday before the announce-

ment, referring to the Taiwan Strait.

"So we urge the US side to act on President Biden's commitment of not supporting Taiwan independence," he said. The US delegation will be in Taipei "to represent the American people," the White House official told reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss details of the trip before it was announced. The official called Taiwan "a model for democracy not only in the region but also globally." Despite an absence of formal relations with Taiwan, the US is the island's strongest ally and is obligated under a 1979 law to help Taiwan protect itself from invasion.

It's unclear how Beijing would respond to an unofficial US delegation at the Taiwanese inauguration, but "Beijing will be the provocateur should it choose to respond with additional military pressure or coercion," the US official said, adding that the administration is not predicting how China would respond. Beijing has repeatedly warned Washington not to meddle with Taiwan's affairs, which it says are a core interest for China because it is a matter of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Beijing sees Washington's support for Taiwan as provocative. The US insists any differences be resolved peacefully and opposes any unilateral changes

by either side to the status quo. "We do not support Taiwan independence," the administration official said. "We support cross-strait dialogue."

Taiwan has topped the agenda in US-China relations, which have soured over issues ranging from trade, cybersecurity and human rights to spying. The Biden administration, in its competition with China, has engaged in "intense diplomacy" aimed at preventing tensions from spiraling out of control.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Secretary of State Antony Blinken have recently visited China in the administration's latest effort to keep communications open and minimize misunderstanding. Shortly after Lai was elected in January, President Joe Biden sent an unofficial delegation to Taipei to meet Lai, drawing protests from Beijing. Members of Congress also have travelled to Taiwan to meet the president-elect. Plans are underway for a congressional delegation to visit Taiwan shortly after the inauguration. Beijing reiterated its claim over Taiwan immediately after Lai was elected and said "the basic fact that Taiwan is part of China will not change." Days later, Nauru, a tiny Pacific nation, severed its diplomatic ties with Taiwan, which now is recognized by 12 governments, including the Vatican.

**PPGCL**  
PRAYAGRAJ POWER GENERATION COMPANY LIMITED

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**NOTICE INVITING EXPRESSION OF INTEREST**

**Prayagraj Power Generation Company Limited** invites expression of interest (EOI) from eligible vendors for Title of Procurement: **HARDOX/ABREX Plate (Different Size)** of 3x660 MW Thermal Power Plant at Prayagraj Power Generation Company Limited, Bara, Dist. Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Details of pre-qualification requirements, bid security, purchasing of tender document etc. may be downloaded using the URL-<https://www.ppgcl.co.in/tenders.php> Eligible vendors willing to participate may submit their expression of interest along with the tender fee for issue of bid document latest by **25<sup>th</sup> May 2024**.

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**NOTICE INVITING EXPRESSION OF INTEREST**

**Prayagraj Power Generation Company Limited** invites expression of interest (EOI) from eligible vendors for Title of Procurement: **ESP Rapping Spares for ESP Overhauling of 3x660 MW Thermal Power Plant at Prayagraj Power Generation Company Limited, Bara, Dist. Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India.**

Details of pre-qualification requirements, bid security, purchasing of tender document etc. may be downloaded using the URL-<https://www.ppgcl.co.in/tenders.php> Eligible vendors willing to participate may submit their expression of interest along with the tender fee for issue of bid document latest by **25<sup>th</sup> May 2024**.

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**NOTICE INVITING EXPRESSION OF INTEREST**

**Prayagraj Power Generation Company Limited** invites expression of interest (EOI) from eligible vendors for **PROCUREMENT OF FERRIC CHLORIDE (ANHYDROUS TECHNICAL GRADE - 98% - Pack Size 25 Kg in Waterproof Bag)** of 3x660 MW Thermal Power Plant at Prayagraj Power Generation Company Limited, Bara, Dist. Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Details of pre-qualification requirements, bid security, purchasing of tender document etc. may be downloaded using the URL-<https://www.ppgcl.co.in/tenders.php> Eligible vendors willing to participate may submit their expression of interest along with the tender fee for issue of bid document latest by **25<sup>th</sup> May 2024**.

# Gen Zs, millennials globally optimistic about economy, social situation: Survey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

More than half of Gen Zs and two-thirds of millennials globally are optimistic about the economic and social situation of the country and expect it to improve further, a Deloitte survey said on Wednesday.

Both generations are optimistic about GenAI and its potential benefits in improving the way they work with 4 in 10 undergoing training, the Deloitte's 2024 Gen Z and millennial survey said. The survey also found that nine in 10 Gen Zs and millennials say the purpose is important for job satisfaction and are likely to reject work or employers that do not align with their ethics and beliefs. The survey gathers insights from more than 22,800 Gen Z and millennial respondents across 44 countries and explores how Gen Zs and millennials perceive the transformations occurring in the world around them.

Fieldwork for the survey was completed between November 24, 2023 and February 13, 2024. Gen Z respondents were born between January 1995 and December 2005 and the millennial respondents between January 1983 and December 1994.

According to the survey, millennials are feeling more optimistic about the overall economic, financial, and social outlook compared with their global counterparts and this sentiment is boosted by India's sustained economic growth amid a global slowdown.



Two-thirds of millennials (65 per cent) and more than half of the Gen Zs (58 per cent) expect the country's economic outlook to improve in the next year. It is a significantly better situation compared with the previous year, as more Gen Zs (62 per cent) and millennials (64 per cent) are now confident of their financial situation. As per the survey, both the generations believe GenAI will have a positive impact on their work-life balance and how they work. More than half of the Gen Zs (51 per cent) and millennials (54 per cent) frequently use GenAI at work and strongly feel that it will free up their time for creative and strategic work.

However, they are equally convinced that they will need to reskill and GenAI will influence their career decisions and cause some job loss. The survey also highlights how women are more upbeat about GenAI and slightly more comfortable working with it than men. "Millennials and Gen Zs are the agents of change and contribute significantly to shaping the future of work. More than half of the respondents are excited about GenAI and believe that this new technology will positively impact their work-life balance, allowing more time for creative and strategic work", Deloitte Chief People and Experience Officer said.

# Exports up one per cent in April; trade deficit widens to four months high

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's merchandise exports rose by 1 per cent to USD 34.99 billion in April even as the trade deficit widened to a four-month high of USD 19.1 billion during the month, according to government data. Healthy growth in sectors such as electronics, chemicals, petroleum products and pharmaceuticals has helped in registering positive growth in exports despite global economic uncertainties. Imports also increased by 10.25 per cent to USD 54.09 billion in the month under review from USD 49.06 billion in April 2023



due to a significant jump in gold imports. The imports of precious metals more than doubled to USD 3.11 billion in April this year. Crude oil imports rose by 20.22 per cent to USD 16.5 billion. Trade deficit, or the gap between imports and exports, in April 2023 stood at USD

14.44 billion. The previous high in the deficit was recorded in December 2023 at USD 19.8 billion. In March 2024, the outbound shipments dipped to USD 41.68 billion from USD 41.96 billion a year ago. Briefing media on the data, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said the figures show that the new fiscal year started on a good note and hoped that it would continue. He informed that the data for the country's total exports in goods and services for 2023-24 has been revised to USD 778.21 billion, which is the "highest" so far. Merchandise exports in the last fiscal was aggregated at

USD 437.1 billion, while services exports stood at USD 341.1 billion. In merchandise exports, 13 of the 30 key sectors exhibited positive growth in April as compared to same period last year. These include coffee, tobacco, spices, plastic and handicrafts. According to the commerce ministry data, released on Wednesday, the estimated value of services exports for April is USD 29.57 billion compared to USD 25.78 billion in April 2023. Imports of services are estimated to be increased to USD 16.97 billion during the month as compared to USD 13.96 billion in April 2023.

# Markets snap three days winning run; Sensex slips over 100 points

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Wednesday after three days of rally, dragged down by selling pressure in HDFC Bank and unabated foreign fund outflows. Halting its three-day rally, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 117.58 points or 0.16 per cent to settle at 72,987.03. During the day, it lost 281.95 points or 0.38 per cent to 72,822.66. The NSE Nifty dipped 17.30

points or 0.08 per cent to 22,200.55. From the Sensex pack, Tata Motors, Asian Paints, HDFC Bank, JSW Steel, Hindustan Unilever, Nestle and Titan were the major laggards. In contrast, Bharti Airtel, Power Grid, NTPC, Mahindra & Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro and HCL Technologies were among the major gainers. In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower. Markets in South Korea and

Hong Kong were closed for a holiday. European markets were trading mostly higher. Wall Street ended with gains on Tuesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.21 per cent to USD 82.55 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,065.52 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark climbed 328.48 points or 0.45 per cent to settle at 73,104.61 on Tuesday.

# MakeMyTrip posts Q4 profit of USD 171.9 million

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Nasdaq-listed MakeMyTrip Ltd on Wednesday reported a multi-fold jump in profit at USD 171.9 million in the March 2024 quarter, aided by gains on tax credit and convertible notes value. The company had posted a profit of USD 5.4 million in the same quarter previous fiscal, MakeMyTrip said in a statement.

# Coal's share in India power generation capacity drops below 50 per cent for first time since 1960s

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The share of coal in India's total power generation capacity dipped below 50 per cent in the first quarter of 2024, the first time since the 1960s. The latest POWERup quarterly report from the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) showed that renewable energy accounted for 71.5 per cent of the record 13,669 megawatts (MW) power generation capacity added by India in the first quarter (January-March) of this year. Coal's share, including lignite, in India's total power generation capacity dropped below 50 per cent for the first time since the 1960s. The report noted that the renewable energy trend is well ahead of India's target of achieving 50 per cent cumulative power generation capacity from non-fossil fuel-based sources by 2030. The decline in coal's share of power generation capacity mirrors a global trend, with demand for coal in G7 countries hitting record lows in 2023, levels not seen since 1900. To accelerate the transition, G7 countries pledged last month to phase out all unabated coal power generation by 2035, building on their commitment to halt



all construction of new coal-fired power plants. The term "unabated" generally refers to the continued use of coal, oil, and gas without efforts to curtail emissions. At the United Nations' COP28 climate change conference in December last year, world leaders reached a historic agreement to transition away from planet-warming fossil fuels and triple the global renewable energy capacity by 2030. According to the report, a record 69 gigawatts (GW) of renewable energy tenders were issued in India in the fiscal year (FY) 2023-24, surpassing the central government's target of 50 GW per year. "After a downturn from 2019 to 2022 due to supply-chain issues and global price spikes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the

market has rebounded and gone from strength to strength," Vibhuti Garg, Director - South Asia, IEEFA, said. India has risen to third place in the world's solar power generation rankings, trailing only China and the US, according to Ember's fifth annual Global Electricity Review of 80 countries. Ranked ninth in 2015, India has now overtaken Japan, which, along with fellow G7 member Germany, has a persistently high demand for coal. Solar power generated a record 5.5 per cent of global electricity in 2023, with India generating 5.8 per cent of its electricity from solar last year. Solar remained the world's fastest-growing electricity source for the 19th consecutive year in 2023, adding more than twice as much new electricity worldwide as coal. India witnessed the world's fourth-largest increase in solar generation in 2023 (+18 terawatt hour or TWh), behind China (+156 TWh), the United States (+33 TWh), and Brazil (+22 TWh). Together, the top four solar growth countries accounted for 75 per cent of growth in 2023. Solar's contribution to electricity generation in India surged from 0.5 per cent in 2015 to 5.8 per cent in 2023.

# Sebi eases KYC compliance guidelines

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has decided to simplify the risk management framework for validating Know Your Customer (KYC) records through KYC Registration Agencies (KRAs), a move that will ensure ease of transacting for investors, experts said on Wednesday. Under the new framework, KRAs can now verify PAN, name, address, email, and mobile number from official databases. If these details are found to be in order, they will be considered validated records, Ankit Ratan, Co-founder & CEO, Signzy said. "The new framework is expected to address challenges faced by many investors while also ensuring the verification of investors' digital identities. With a growing number of investors embracing digital platforms

for investment, verifying digital identities has become increasingly important," he added. The exchanges, depositories, and relevant intermediaries are tasked with implementing necessary technical changes in their systems by May-end. Mutual fund houses, broking firms, and portfolio management service providers will need to implement robust compliance tools and risk management frameworks to safeguard investor data privacy and security. This will help ensure that all investors are onboarded after identity verification. KRA involves entities such as CAMS KRA, BSE KRA, NSE KRA, among others. These agencies are responsible for maintaining the KYC details of individuals, typically gathering information from brokers, exchanges, and



intermediaries. On Tuesday, Sebi simplified the risk management framework for ease of transacting by clients based on the feedback received from the stakeholders in the securities market. Simplifying the guideline, the regulator has modified the circular issued in October 2023. In October last year, the verification process underwent an update,

Tax Department database on PAN, Aadhaar, XML, Digilocker or M-Aadhaar) will be considered 'validated records'. Individuals with invalid documentation will not be permitted to trade in the securities market," Feroze Azeem, Deputy CEO of Anand Rathi Wealth, said. This initiative by Sebi serves to safeguard investor interests in securities and foster the development and regulation of securities markets, representing a significant step forward in consumer protection, he added. Signzy Ratan said that Sebi's move will ensure the protection of investor interests in the capital market and promote the development of security markets. It represents a significant step towards enhancing digital trust and creating a secure digital environment for investors.

# Government aims to boost use of artificial intelligence in food processing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India plans to accelerate the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the food processing sector to improve efficiency, enhance farmers' incomes and reduce the environmental impact, officials said on Wednesday. At a conference organised by NIFTEM (National Institute of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management) on using frontier technologies in the sector, senior bureaucrats and government advisors stressed the need for a roadmap to deploy AI tools, which are still at a nascent stage in the country's massive food processing industry. "As an industry, we need to create a roadmap. The MEITY secretary has come on board. I am sure he is going to be a big support in this endeavour," Food Processing Secretary Anita Praveen said, referring to the secretary of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY). MEITY Secretary S Krishnan pitched for wider adoption of AI, saying some work was already happening in



agriculture but the food processing sector was still in the early stages of using such technologies. NITI Aayog member Ramesh Chand said efficient food processing was "climate smart", helping enhance farmer incomes, satisfy consumers and reduce environmental impact amid increasing climate change challenges. He suggested using AI to develop simple portable devices for quality assaying of agricultural produce, which could be a "great service to the nation". "Can we think of low-scale devices to check the quality of the produce? In the absence of assaying devices, we are still focusing on quantity rather than quality," Chand said. The officials said AI tools could help improve overall sector efficiency as India aims to reach net zero emissions by 2070.

# IIFCL profit rises 44 per cent in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd (IIFCL) on Wednesday reported a 44 per cent jump in standalone net profit to Rs 1,552 crore for the fiscal ended March 2024 aided by an increase in lending and moderation in bad loans. The state-owned infrastructure finance company had earned a net profit of Rs 1,076 crore in the previous fiscal. The company recorded the highest-ever profit, recovery, sanction and disbursement turnaround performance that began three years ago, IIFCL managing director PR Jaishankar said while announcing annual financial numbers. He said, for the first time, the profit before tax has crossed Rs 2,000 crore. During the year, profit before tax has increased to Rs 2,029 crore as against Rs 1,076 crore in the previous year. The company continued to add value as its net worth increased 11 per cent to Rs 14,266 crore in 2023-24 from Rs 12,878 crore in the preceding fiscal.

# LG looks to enhance leadership in TV segment with products tailored for India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Korean consumer electronics major LG will continue to introduce products in the home entertainment segment tailored for India to maintain its leadership position, according to senior company officials. LG Electronics India, which on Wednesday launched 55 AI-enabled television models, expects to grow 25-30 per cent this year in its home entertainment (HE) vertical. India is the most important market globally, a company official said. "There is a growing demand for large screen TVs in India and we are constantly enhancing our portfolio with products like the World's largest 97-inch TV with vibrant picture quality, advanced AI-powered processing technologies...With this new lineup, we aim to further enhance our market leadership in flat panel TV in India," LG Electronics India Managing Director Hong Ju Jeon said. The company plans to enhance its India-specific product lineups. "LG Electronics thinking about the Indian market is not one of the important markets, but it is the most important market," LG Electronics India Director HE, Brian Jung told PTI. Compared with the European and American TV market where most of the products have moved up to OLED technology, the Indian market is a bit different with LED technology still dominant, he added. "So, we are trying to deliver



our product to the Indian consumer which is a 'picked' product," Jung said. He however said the Indian market has witnessed a rapid evolution in terms of screen size and also on technology. "The Indian market is growing very rapidly and by quantity and by quality," he added. LG has market leadership in India in the television segment with 27.1 per cent, he said, adding that the brand is loved by consumers in the country "especially in the home entertainment category and we will keep to uphold it." The Indian television market is estimated to be around Rs 28,000 crore annually. When asked about the growth outlook, LG Electronics India Business Head, Home Entertainment Abhiral Bhansali said, "Last year was also good for us. This year we are targeting roughly about 25 to 30 per cent growth versus last year." In the HE segment, the company clocked revenue of Rs 8,000 crore last year. The company has a TV production capacity of 30 lakh units annually at its Pune plant.

# Aadhar Housing Finance shares make flat market debut

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd, which is backed by private equity major Blackstone, made a flat market debut on Wednesday against the issue price of Rs 315. The stock listed at par with the issue price at Rs 315 on the NSE. It later hit a high of Rs 329.90 and a low of Rs 292. On the BSE, the stock made its debut at Rs 314.30, a dip of 0.22 per cent from the issue price. The company's market valuation stood at Rs 13,480.12 crore. The initial public offer of Aadhar Housing Finance received 25.49 times subscription on the closing day of the share-sale on Friday. The Rs 3,000-crore initial share-sale was a combination of fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 1,000 crore and an OFS (Offer-for-Sale) of Rs 2,000 crore by promoter BCP Topco VII Pte Ltd, an affiliate of Blackstone Group Inc. The three-day IPO had a price range of Rs 300-315 a share. The company plans to utilise Rs 750 crore of the fresh issue proceeds to meet future capital requirements towards onward lending, while a portion will be used for general corporate purposes. Aadhar Housing Finance offers a range of mortgage-related loan products, including loans for residential property purchase and construction; home improvement and extension loans; and loans for commercial property construction and acquisition. The housing finance company is focused on the low-income housing segment, serving economically weaker and low-to-middle-income customers, who require small-ticket mortgage loans.

# BUSINESS BRIEF

## BAWEJA IS NEW DIRECTOR (FINANCE), REC LIMITED

Gurugram: Harsh Baweja has taken charge as Director (Finance) at REC Limited after the approval from the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) on May 10. Baweja's appointment follows the recommendation by PESB, which identified him as the ideal candidate for the role after a rigorous selection process involving 11 candidates. Baweja, a seasoned Chartered Accountant, brings with him an extensive experience of over 33 years in managing financial & business operations across multiple institutions. With over three decades of expertise in finance and a background as a Chartered Accountant, Baweja's appointment underscores his proven track record in navigating complex financial landscapes.

## EPSI ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION



Chennai: Educational institutions for engineering have a greater role to play in the process of nation building, said Prof T G Sitharam, Chairman of AICTE. He was speaking at the inauguration of a round table discussion on 'Higher Education in India: Opportunities and Challenges in the context of NEP Implementation' at SRM Institute of Science and Technology premises at Kattankulathur near Chennai today.

## SAIL LAUNCHES PROGRESSIVE HR INITIATIVES

New Delhi: To strengthen the culture of sustained learning and development in the organisation, Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) on May 14 launched a number of key progressive Human Resource (HR) initiatives. SAIL has introduced the policy of Work from Other than Workplace, which was launched by Amarendu Prakash, chairman, SAIL. Under this policy, an employee will be allowed to work from other than workplace on undertaking a prescribed self-development activity.

## SAARC SECRETARY GENERAL VISITS SAU

New Delhi: Md Golam Sarwar, Secretary General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), visited the South Asian University on May 14. He was warmly received by SAU officials, and students from across South Asian Countries. Sarwar met the president, Professor KK Aggarwal, who briefed him about the journey of the university, the new programmes introduced and avenues for future development. Sarwar appreciated SAU for the achievements it has had in such a short period and underlined the impressive campus and infrastructure of its permanent campus in Maidan Garhi.

# Is it time to worry about another trial, asks Aman Sehrawat

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Aman Sehrawat, the lone male Indian wrestler to have qualified for Paris Olympics, finds it annoying that instead of shifting his focus on preparing for the Games, he still has to worry about cutting his weight to prepare for another round of trials.

The 20-year-old Under-23 world champion saved India the blushes by securing a berth in men's freestyle 57kg for the Games at the recent World Qualifiers in Istanbul. In 11 other weight categories where the country's male wrestlers competed, India drew a blank as none of them could qualify.

"So many times I have cut my weight. How many times I have to do it? It causes a lot of weakness. I don't understand do I think of now winning trials again or start preparing for Olympics. I think the work I need to put for a good preparation will be affected if I am asked to go through the trials again," Aman told PTI in an interview.

"By the time trials are finished, Olympics will be almost there,

so when do we start preparations? In my opinion trials should not be held," said Aman, whose natural body weight is 62kg.

Aman, who is Asian Games bronze medallist and Asian Championships title winner, is confident that he will be in reckoning for a medal at the Games.

"I see myself in top-3 in the world. Russia and Albania are strong and it will be close with them, others I can manage," he said.

Aman had lost to Albania's Zelimkhan Abakarov in the 2023 World Championship where Serbia's Steven Andria Micici had emerged champion. Zaur Uguev, the two-time world champion from Russia is also a strong wrestler, who had defeated Ravi Dahiya in the Tokyo Games gold medal match.

Most probably Aman will have to beat Ravi Dahiya when the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) holds trials.

Ravi, and the other top-3 wrestlers in men's 57kg category at the last trials held in Sonepat, will have to

compete against each other and the winner among them will fight it out with quota winner Aman.

"I would have already left for Russia for training if not for these trials. It is better that I train abroad with good wrestlers. I think I have done enough training in India and now it's time to train and spar with my competitors.

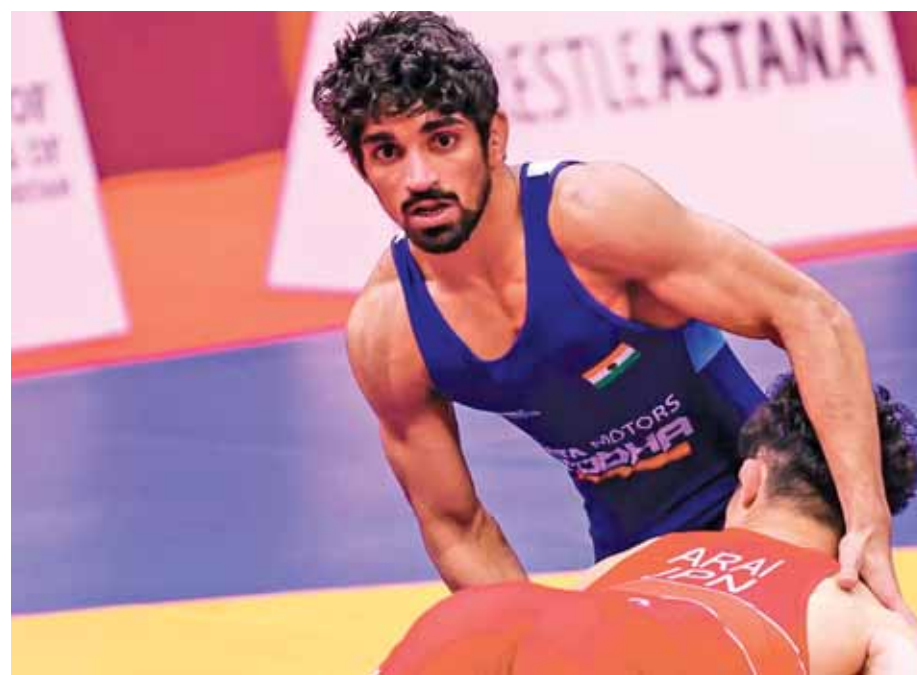
"That will prepare me well for Olympics. I will get a fair idea about my rivals," said Aman, who joined the Chhatarsal Stadium at the age of 10 and has been making a steady progress.

Aman argues that it's not just weight-cut that troubles wrestlers.

"Recovery is also very important. Trials, weight-cut and recovery will eat up a lot of time before Olympics if trials are held again," he said.

Aman also understands the weight of expectations. He is considered the next big thing in Indian wrestling and he is aware of that.

"I hear a lot of things about me. People have expectations now from me. I felt very bad when I



could not qualify at the Asian Qualifiers in Bishkek. It does affect if I am not able to meet expectations. I worked hard for World Qualifiers and finally achieved it," he said adding that

he likes the fame coming his way. He lost his parents in 2015 and since then, Chhatarsal Stadium has been his home. He spoke about the support and care he

gets from his "brother" Sagar, who is a Greco Roman wrestler.

"I relish my success with Sagar. He is more than a brother for me. He takes care of everything

at 'akhada'. I just focus on my practice. He manages what I need to do, what I need to eat, when to eat, and helps in practice," said Aman.

Sagar is six years senior to Aman and wants to see his friend achieve what he could not.

"I lost my chances but now I want him to do what I could not do," said Sagar, who competed in 2019 World Championship in Nur Sultan.

"He was 10 year-old when he joined us. I was 16 then. I know that support at the right time matters. I did not get it, but I try to do it for him. What I like about Aman is that he is honest. He never lies about practice and training."

**MY STAMINA IS GOOD BUT DEFENSE IS AN ISSUE:** Aman considers endurance, like all other Indian wrestlers, as his strength. He admits that he has to change his bout strategy a bit to continue to excel at the big stage.

"My stamina is pretty good. Defense is my weakness though. They (coaches) want me to attack from the word go. The mistakes I committed in

Asian Qualifier, I did not repeat in Istanbul. I was thinking about tiring out my opponent in the first period and then launch an attack, but it did not work, so changed my strategy.

"I also need to work on my leg attacks."

**AMAN NEEDS HIS OWN COACH BY HIS SIDE DURING TOURNAMENTS:** Lalit Kumar, who is the head coach at Chhatarsal Stadium and has monitored Aman's progress, is a firm believer that he needs to have his personal coach by his side if he has to win medals at global level.

"Look, these guys train at their centres for years. They get ready there with different coaches and then at the competitions, different coaches guide them. This is counter-productive I feel," said Lalit, who is a Dronacharya awardee.

"We know how their bodies react. What kind of warm up they require. This is my personal opinion, rest is up to WFI. We are preparing Ravi also for trials. Let's see who wins."

## Daniil Medvedev latest to crash out of Italian Open after loss to Tommy Paul

AP ■ ROME

The curse of the defending champion struck again for Daniil Medvedev. The second-seeded Medvedev has never successfully defended a title and he failed again on Tuesday as he lost 6-1, 6-4 to American Tommy Paul to become the latest top player to crash out of the Italian Open.

"It's disappointing, to be honest," said Medvedev, who has won 20 tour-level titles. "I wanted to do better here. I was not even close. What can I say? The more titles I win, the more chances I have to defend.

"So the more tournaments in a year I'm going to play where I already won, maybe not defend, but at least win twice the same tournament, that's what I'm going to try to do."

The opener lasted just 28 minutes as the 14th-seeded Paul broke Medvedev on all three of his service games and then served out the set to love.

"Was a tough one. Mentally I had to be much better," Medvedev said. "I started to calm myself down and focus on the match only at the end of the match, and it was too late. I had to do better. I was expecting myself to play better."

Medvedev improved slightly in the second set when he broke immediately but Paul broke straight back and never looked back, securing his spot in the quarterfinals when Medvedev sent a backhand long.

The second-seeded Medvedev followed 10-time champion Rafael Nadal and top-ranked Novak Djokovic with early exits in Rome.

The only other players to have won the men's tournament at the Foro Italico in



the past 19 years are Andy Murray and Alexander Zverev.

The third-seeded Zverev, who won in 2017, eased past Nuno Borges 6-2, 7-5 and will face Taylor Fritz.

Fritz reached the men's quarterfinals for the first time after recovering from losing a lengthy second-set tiebreaker - during which he let slip match point - to see off Grigor Dimitrov 6-2, 6-7 (11), 6-1.

Alejandro Tabilo backed up his stunning third-round win against Djokovic by edging Karen Khachanov 7-6 (5), 7-6 (10) to reach a Masters quarterfinal for the first time. He will face Zhang Zhizhen, who ousted Thiago Monteiro 7-6 (4), 6-3.

Paul will play Hubert Hurkacz after the seventh seed - who eliminated Nadal in the second round - beat Sebastian Baez 5-7, 7-6 (4), 6-4. The other quarterfinal

pits Stefanos Tsitsipas against Nicolas Pietrangeli.

In the women's tournament, top-ranked Iga Swiatek reached the final four when she swept aside former finalist Madison Keys 6-1, 6-3 with the same score she achieved against the American in the Madrid semifinals two weeks ago.

The 16th-ranked Keys grew more frustrated at her inability to convert break points - racking up 10 without converting a single one - and at one point hit her racket against the clay.

Swiatek won the Madrid Open and is attempting to become the first player to win the "dirt double" since Serena Williams and Nadal both did so in 2013. The two-time champion will next face third-seeded Coco Gauff after the American beat Qinwen Zheng 7-6 (4), 6-1.

PTI ■ ROME

The Indo-Australian pair of Rohan Bopanna and Matthew Ebden bowed out of the ATP Italian Open following a pre-quarterfinal loss to local hopes Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori here.

The second seeds went down 2-6 4-6 in a match that lasted one hour and 13 minutes on Tuesday.

They had defeated wildcards Matteo Arnaldi and Francesco Passaro in their opening round clash.

It was a disappointing day for Bopanna and Ebden, who were broken twice in the first set. Their opponents, however, did not concede a single break point in the opener. The Indo-Australian combination also double-faulted twice to concede the early initiative.

In the second set too, Bopanna

## Bopanna, Ebden pair bows out of Italian Open with pre QF loss



and Ebden continued to be on the backfoot and were broken thrice. They did manage to break their rivals Bolelli and

Vavassori twice but were out of depth overall. The defeat continues a poor recent run that included a first-

round exit from the Madrid Masters earlier this month.

Bopanna and Ebden have nonetheless enjoyed a good run on the circuit, winning the Australian Open men's doubles title this year. Last year, they won the Indian Wells Masters which made the 43-year-old Indian the oldest ever ATP Masters 1000 champion.

The duo made the men's doubles semi-finals at Wimbledon and the final of the US Open in the same season. Bopanna also became the oldest world number one in doubles, thanks to the Australian Open triumph in January.



## FIFA moves toward ending soccer tradition and letting league games be staged in other countries

AP ■ BANGKOK

FIFA moved Wednesday toward ending decades of soccer tradition by reviewing the rules that currently block domestic league games being played in other countries.

Fans are likely to object to their teams' home matches potentially being moved thousands of miles (kilometers) away. The United States and Saudi Arabia are expected to be willing hosts to lure competitive games from top European countries, and FIFA recently agreed to withdraw from an ongoing court case in New York filed by promoter Relevent to challenge the policy. The new FIFA policy will likely be attractive to the growing number of international owners of European clubs, including the wave of U.S. investors in the English Premier League, Italy's Serie A and France's Ligue 1, and state-backed teams like Abu Dhabi-owned Manchester City, Qatar-owned Paris Saint-

Germain and Saudi-owned Newcastle.

FIFA is now creating a panel of 10-15 people representing soccer stakeholders to advise within months on amending the rules on so-called "out-of-territory" games. The rules were last amended in 2014.

Attempts since then to have European league games abroad, including taking Barcelona to Miami in 2019, were blocked as U.S. Promoters seek to give fans more than just preseason exhibition games involving the world's best club teams. FIFA directed its working group, which is yet to be appointed, to consider fairness and giving "advance notice to fans who may miss the opportunity to attend a home or away match in the home territory." Other factors for the FIFA panel include "respect for the recognized structure of international football" and potential disruption to fans, teams and leagues in the country hosting "out-of-territory" games.

## F1 driver Alex Albon signs a multiyear contract extension with Williams

AP ■ GROVE (UK)

Formula One driver Alex Albon has ended speculation about his future by signing a multiyear contract extension with Williams.

The F1 team made the announcement on Wednesday, ahead of this weekend's Emilia Romagna Grand Prix.

The British-born Thai driver had been linked with moves to both Red Bull and Mercedes. He was under contract at Williams through 2025.

Williams said the new deal will keep Albon at the team "into the new era of Formula 1

regulations," which kick off in 2026. It did not give more details.

"I am incredibly happy to be remaining with Williams Racing and to continue working with such a talented and dedicated team of people," Albon said in a press release.

The 28-year-old Albon is in his third consecutive season with Williams. He has yet to score a point this year.

"It has been a difficult start to the year but since joining Williams we have made significant progress together and I have seen the huge changes happening behind the scenes to take us back to the front of the grid," he said.



Albon started his career in 2019 with Red Bull's junior team but was dropped by Red Bull in 2020. Albon last season scored 27 points to help Williams finish seventh in the constructors' championship, the team's best result in six years.

"We are delighted to secure Alex's long-term future with Williams Racing," said Williams team principal James Vowles. "He has exceptional talent, technical input and dedication to the cause and this is a huge vote of confidence in Williams and the journey back to competitiveness that we are on."



## PSG says Mbappé will not play against Nice in French league because of hamstring pain

AP ■ PARIS

Departing Paris Saint-Germain striker Kylian Mbappé was left out of the squad traveling to Nice in the French league because of pain in his left hamstring, the club said. PSG has already secured a 12th league title and plays the Riviera club later Wednesday in a rearranged fixture. PSG will then conclude its league campaign on Sunday at Metz.

PSG also will be missing forward Ousmane Dembélé, who received a knock on his left thigh in the 3-1 loss against Toulouse last weekend.

Mbappé grabbed his league-leading 27th goal of the season against Toulouse in what was his last home game for the club.

Mbappé publicly confirmed last week that he is leaving at the end of the season, having already informed the club in February. Although he has yet to announce his destination, Mbappé is widely expected to join Real Madrid.

PSG hopes he will be fit again to feature in the French Cup final against Lyon on May 25 with a chance to add to his club-record tally of 256 goals.

Fifth-place Nice is four points behind Lille and Brest and can still qualify for next season's Champions League.

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Anjum Moudgil and Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar came out on top of the women's and men's 50m rifle 3 positions Olympic Selection Trial (OST) T3 qualification round respectively at the M.P. State Shooting Academy (MPSSA) ranges here on Wednesday.

After the customary 20 shots in the kneeling, prone and standing positions, Anjum shot a score of 592/600, her highest of the OSTs so far, while Aishwary shot yet another quality score of 590 to top the five-man field.

The duo will come back along with their four other competitors on Thursday morning for the finals of the event, where crucial podium points are up for grabs in what is building up to be a fight to the finish.

Indian number one and finals world record holder Sift Kaur Samra came

## Anjum, Aishwary top qualifications of third 3P Olympic Selection Trial



in second with a score of 589 in the women's 3P, while three others, Ashi Chouksey, Nishchal and Shriyanka Sadangi, logged identical totals of 585.

In the men's 3P, Swapnil Kusale extended a good trials run with a score of 587 to come in second behind Aishwary, while Akhil Sheeran's 584 for a third-place finish was his worst of the three trials so far.

Chain Singh and Niraj Kumar were fourth and fifth with scores of 583 each.

Besides the 3P OST T3 finals, the qualification rounds of the men's and women's 10m air pistol OST T3 matches will also take place.



# SUNRISERS LOOK TO SEAL PLAYOFF BERTH

**PTI ■ HYDERABAD**

Masters of their own fate right now despite being erratic, Sunrisers Hyderabad will hope their destructive batting line-up delivers when they take on Gujarat Titans in pursuit of a playoffs berth in the Indian Premier League here on Thursday.

Another win will be enough for Sunrisers to seal a playoff berth as they need only one point to ensure qualification. But the Pat Cummins-led side will also want to challenge for the top two spots, which is a possibility considering they have one more game after this match and a healthy net run rate of +0.406. SRH have 14 points from 12 matches and can reach a maximum of 18 points, which may be enough to ensure a top-two finish if other results go their way.

Not only are the Sunrisers players well-rested ahead of the clash against GT as they got a week off, their morale will also be sky high after notching yet another record-breaking win against Lucknow Super Giants on May 8.

If the bowlers did a commendable job to restrict

LSG to a blow-par score, the opening duo of Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma made a mockery of the hosts by chasing down 166 in just 9.4 overs to notch a 10-wicket win at home.

SRH have made a habit of securing unbelievable victories throughout the season but they have also suffered sizeable defeats, including against GT (by 7 wickets) earlier in the competition.

The boom or bust approach by the batters has either done exceedingly well or has simply let the side down, including three times in the last five games, where SRH lost to RCB (by 35 runs), CSK (by 78 runs) and MI (by 7 wickets).

The 2016 champions would hope Head and Sharma deliver as SRH are heavily dependent on the explosive starts provided by the duo.

They will also want to do a better job at re-building their innings, especially while chasing. The likes of Nitish Reddy, Heinrich Klaasen and Abdul Samad need to manage that better.

On the other hand, the Titans, who have only five wins from 13 games and are on 11 points, are out of the reckoning and

## GT AIM TO END CAMPAIGN ON A HIGH



will look to end their forgettable campaign on a high.

With former skipper Hardik Pandya moving to Mumbai Indians this season, GT struggled to find a replacement for the all-rounder who was key to their title-winning run in 2022 and runners-up finish last year.

The absence of pacer Mohammed Shami, who was ruled out of the tournament due to injury, has also hurt them.

GT's bowling hasn't been as effective this season, with inconsistent pacers and leaky spinners.

Their last match against Kolkata Knight Riders was a washout but the bowlers showed promise by taking three wickets in the first three overs against CSK.

Mohit Sharma's variations and knuckle balls were particularly effective, and Rashid Khan's clever bowling was noticeable. They'll hope for an encore.

In the batting department, much will depend on skipper Shubman Gill and B Sai Sudharsan, who revelled in the role of an opener. David Miller has looked off-colour this season and his big hits would be crucial to ensure that the side signs off on a positive note.

**SQUADS:**

**Sunrisers Hyderabad:** Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Aiden Markram, Abdul Samad, Nitish Reddy, Shahbaz Ahmed, Pat Cummins (c), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jaydev Unadkat, T Natarajan, Mayank Markande, Umran Malik, Anmolpreet Singh, Glenn Phillips (wk), Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Upendra Yadav (wk), Jhathavedh Subramanyan, Sanvir Singh, Vijayakanth Vijayakanth, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Marco Jansen, Akash Maharaj Singh, Manav Agarwal.

**Gujarat Titans:** Shubman Gill (c), David Miller, Matthew Wade, Wriddhiman Saha, Kane Williamson, Abhinav Manohar, B. Sai Sudharsan, Darshan Nalkande, Vijay Shankar, Jayant Yadav, Rahul Tewatia, Noor Ahmad, Sai Kishore, Rashid Khan, Joshua Little, Mohit Sharma, Azmatullah Omarzai, Umesh Yadav, Shahrukh Khan, Sushant Mishra, Kartik Tyagi, Manav Suthar, Spencer Johnson, Sandeep Warrier and BR Sharath.



## Hopefully we get the momentum at the right time: Phil Salt

**PTI ■ KOLKATA**

Kolkata Knight Riders have been remarkable in the league phase of this IPL season and big-hitting opener Phil Salt is now hoping for the side to sustain the momentum and "put our best foot forward" in the play-offs.

Two-time champions KKR are currently at the top of the pecking order with 9 points following nine wins and three losses in 13 matches.

"It's about taking it day by day and hopefully we put our best foot forward and get the momentum at the right time," Salt said on KKR's Knights Dugout Podcast.

Salt has been one of the key players in KKR's impressive run to the play-offs, forming a formidable partnership with fellow opener Sunil Narine by taking the opposition bowling attack to the cleaners.

Left-arm pacer Mitchell Starc, Salt's colleague at KKR, said the team is desperate to regain the trophy they won twice in the past.

"I'm excited to get involved here at KKR and hopefully it will be a really successful season for us. We're here to get the trophy and that's what we're aiming for and hopefully we're going to do exactly that," Starc said.

The Australian pacer also shed some light on his return to IPL after 10 years.

"It's been a while since I've been here. Was supposed to be here with KKR in 2018 but I got injured. So it's exciting to be back and looking forward to it."

Meanwhile, Salt touched upon his current status at the top of the England squad.

"That was my first experience at being flooded with messages on my phone. I'm generally not someone who uses the phone a lot but it was an incredible experience. My phone was blowing up with messages congratulating me and it was great."

He went on to share an anecdote about facing Jofra Archer in the nets.

"I think Jofra is the fastest I have faced in the nets and that too from 18 yards. He bowls it at that pace from 18 yards with three bouncers in an over. It's good because it helps sharpen the reflexes but there have been times when he's hit me right before the match day and then all hell has broken loose," Salt said.

KKR play the second-placed Rajasthan Royals in Guwahati on the concluding day of the league stage on May 19.

## Abhishek's performance in IPL this season will help him play for India: Markram

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Sunrisers Hyderabad's South African import Aiden Markram believes Abhishek Sharma's destructive IPL form would fetch him an India cap in the not so distant future.

Sharma, who is striking at over 200 in the ongoing edition, has 401 runs in 12 matches. He and Australian Travis Head make for an explosive opening pair and most recently chased down over 160 runs in a less 10 overs against Lucknow Super Giants.

Markram, who is the captain of the South African team, described the duo as "brothers of destruction" in an interview to PTI Videos.

"Abhi (Abhishek) has made massive strides this season. He was showing some really positive signs in the previous seasons and what he's achieved so far this season puts him in good stead for hopefully



representing India one day," Markram said of the 23-year-old left-hander.

"He's got a very calm and level head on his shoulders and he'll take everything in his stride. But my fingers are certainly crossed for him to go to higher honours," he added.

**IMPACT PLAYER RULE GIVES FREEDOM:** Joining the debate surrounding the impact player rule, Markram said that the addition of an extra batter in the line-up has allowed teams to adopt a more aggressive approach.

"Naturally, when you have that extra batter in your batting line-up, you feel more freedom as a player. And obviously from the start of the innings, the openers feel that extra bit of freedom as well," he explained.

"I think we've seen it with quite a few other teams that have been doing it. So I'll definitely say that the impact players have created that and created

Bhuvni leading from the front, as he's done for many, many years, has been excellent for you," he added.

Markram hasn't had the best of seasons so far and has managed 199 runs from nine matches so far. The 30-year-old said he is happy with the effort he is putting into his game.

"I'm still feeling really good. IPL is a tough beast to crack and you as a player have to appreciate that. It's all for good reasons. For me, it's spending lots of time working on my game, working hard off the field as well."

"And if you get another opportunity, you'll feel ready to take that and grab that opportunity hopefully. And if it doesn't work out, then whatever cricket lies ahead, you trust that this preparation puts you in a good state for that," he said acknowledging being out of form.

## Pant is an instinctive captain, he will get better with time: Ganguly

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Delhi Capitals' Director of Cricket Sourav Ganguly feels Rishabh Pant is an instinctive captain and his leadership skills will refine with time and experience.

The dashing wicket-keeper batter returned to competitive cricket after a painstakingly long rehab following a horrific car crash in December 2022.

The 26-year-old resumed his duties as the Delhi Capitals captain.

"Pant is a young captain, he'll learn with time. The way he returned from injury to play a full season; we had our doubts during the off season," Ganguly told JioCinema.

"Indian players are crucial, especially since the TATA IPL shifted to 10 teams. I am very happy for him that he returned to



play so well over a full season. He has all my well wishes for whatever is next," Ganguly added.

Pant has time and again showcased his astute captaincy during the IPL, while he has also erred in his decisions a few times.

"With time, he'll become a better captain. Nobody is a great captain from day one, but he is an

instinctual captain, he makes decisions on the ground. With more time, he'll get better."

DC ended their league stage with seven wins and seven losses. Although they are still alive in the playoffs race as they have a mathematical chance, but in all probability they have all but played their last game this season.

## Injured Rabada returns home from IPL, impact on T20 World Cup preparation unlikely

**PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG**

South Africa pace spearhead Kagiso Rabada has returned home from the Indian Premier League due to a lower limb soft tissue infection, the country's cricket board said on Wednesday.

Rabada represented Punjab Kings in the IPL, taking 11 wickets in as many games. Punjab have already been eliminated from the IPL play-offs race and will play their last league game on May 19.

"The 28-year-old consulted a specialist on arrival in South Africa and is being closely monitored by the Cricket South Africa medical team," said Cricket South Africa (CSA) in a statement.

CSA also said that the injury is unlikely to impact Rabada's preparation for the T20 World Cup in the Americas next month.

"His preparation for the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup in West Indies and USA is not expected to be affected," CSA added.

South Africa open their World Cup campaign against Sri Lanka in New York on June 3.

## Ultra aggressive cricket transformed T20 but time will tell if players can do it in WC: Langer

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Ultra-aggressive cricket, especially in the powerplay, has transformed the shortest format but it remains to be seen if the players can replicate it in the upcoming T20 World Cup in the Americas, said Lucknow Super Giants head coach Justin Langer.

IPL teams have scored 200 or more 37 times this season so far but LSG managed to achieve the feat only once — against Chennai Super Kings last month — and Langer admitted that they had struggled in the powerplay.

"The Lucknow wicket has been a real contest between bat and ball whereas a lot in



this tournament has been very one sided towards the bat. So that's certainly, we haven't capitalised in our powerplay like some of the other teams have," Langer said after LSG lost by 19 runs to Delhi Capitals here on Tuesday night.

"...It's been absolutely amazing watching some of these powerplays. It's almost transformed the game. And whether people can continue to do this and whether they can do it during the World Cup, time will tell. But it's certainly been ultra aggressive cricket."

Defending 209, DC had reduced LSG to 71 for 5 but pace all-rounder Arshad Khan gave a real scare when

"I've thought the whole way through watching this tournament that he's got huge potential and he showed some of that tonight. So when he becomes more consistent, particularly with his bowling, he could be a real handful and a very, very good all-around cricketer."

For DC, Tristan Stubbs was sensational as he smashed a 25-ball 57 and then returned to take a wicket.

"I think Tristan Stubbs, that wicket was important obviously. We tried (Deepak) Hooda when the two left-handers were in and he got a wicket for us two games ago, he didn't get one this game, whereas Stubbs did," Langer said.

"So I thought if we had been a little more intelligent with our batting today, that was a chaseable score on this wicket. He's (Stubbs) a very good cricketer. I've been seeing the power plays in the first six, but we're also seeing the way some of these teams are finishing off, and I think Stubbs is an outstanding cricketer."

Talking about the focus on match-ups these days, Langer said: "There's so much data these days, so when you do your analysis leading into every game and what often happens traditionally is left-handers don't have as much impact on the game against off-spin when the ball's spinning away."

"You saw Bispy (Ravi Bishnoi) bowled beautifully when they're spinning away, whereas when the ball's spinning back into the left-hander or the off-spin is spinning back into the right-hander, it tends to be more in the arc to be hitting some of these sixes."

"So generally the thinking is that the ball that's turning away from the batsman, left or right, is the way that most teams tend to match it up. Often when a wicket quickly falls, you look to get an off spinner on... And the truth is, there's not too many Ravi Ashwins or Nathan Lyons in the world. So it's a specialist role, that's why often part-timers are used."

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